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‘A TRAGIC SUBURBAN MENTALITY’: MANAGERIAL LYRICISM IN  
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## Abstract

This dissertation tells a story about contemporary artistic responses to neoliberalism that emerged in the 1990s. My study focuses on Liam Gillick and Pierre Huyghe, two artists whose work reflects on transformations in the field of work in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. The shift to a postindustrial workforce; the expansion of communication networks; the rise of immaterial labor and service-based work; and the emergence of the experience economy profoundly altered our understanding of what it means to work. If, the 1950s managerial personality was synonymous with the bureaucratic, authoritarian, and conformist ‘organization man’, by the 1990s management embraces the ‘network man’, characterized by adaptability, creativity, collaboration, and participation. As the sphere of work absorbs qualities typically associated with the artistic personality, Gillick and Huyghe work to distinguish their labor from creative-knowledge work in the service of some kind of feel-good, infinitely flexible, neoliberal management scenario.

To date, the critical discourse surrounding Gillick and Huyghe has largely been subsumed under the rhetoric of “relational aesthetics,” a term introduced by curator Nicolas Bourriaud to describe works that engage social interaction and collaboration. Considering the striking similarities between the rhetoric of the experience economy and the contemporaneous turn to experiential practice in art museums, I examine how Gillick and Huyghe engage with experience and participation in innovative ways. Against the clarity of the experience economy’s convivial engagement, the dissertation attends to works that are multivocal and disidentifying, incomplete or deferred, or simply boring. Throughout, I describe how artistic practice intersects with strategic planning, management jargon, quarterly projections, hyperflexible scenarios, business contracts, teamwork, and experience development.

## Introduction

This dissertation tells a story about the artistic responses to neoliberalism that emerged in the 1990s. If neoliberalism marks an unprecedented degree to which the economic reaches into all spheres of life, I argue that we must understand artistic practice in relation to a loose assemblage of its effects: waning faith in the social democratic welfare state; the decline of the avant-garde's heroic utopian vision; business management's embrace of the artistic personality; and the rise of the experience economy. My study focuses on Liam Gillick and Pierre Huyghe, two artists whose work reflects on these concerns and their impact on contemporary art. Gillick and Huyghe came of age as artists in the late 1980s, at a time when the viability of a certain utopian vision, often associated with modernist planning, was harshly denigrated. As Gillick has described:

By the time a generation born in the early 1960's had become activated recipients of a post-war social dynamic, they were simultaneously told that the physical manifestations of it—in varied forms of applied modernism—were failing. They were told that they were within something that should be succeeding and functioning in theory, but certain markers of progressive modern existence were dysfunctional, would never work, and no one ever really wanted them in the first place.<sup>1</sup>

Both Gillick and Huyghe grapple with the profound sense of resignation signaled by neoliberalism's ascension in the US and Europe and summarized by Margaret Thatcher's oft repeated refrain TINA, there is no alternative. Amid this atmosphere, the gestural hero of a certain kind of modernist art history no longer seemed viable—the white male artist, fighting on

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<sup>1</sup> Liam Gillick, "Maybe It Would Be Better If We Worked in Groups of Three? Part 1 of 2: The Discursive," *E-Flux 2* (January 2009): 4, <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/maybe-it-would-be-better-if-we-worked-in-groups-of-three-part-1-of-2-the-discursive/>.

the barricades, struggling to recover those subjective, embodied, and lyrical capacities diminished by capitalist production.<sup>2</sup>

This position was thoroughly discredited by artists working in the postwar period, who challenged the mythic lyricism of the Abstract-Expressionist hero, resorting to deskilling and chance to evacuate the last vestiges of expressivity from the work of art. As a number of scholars have argued, by aligning art with labor, postwar artists adopted personas nearer to factory workers and corporate managers.<sup>3</sup> From industrial work to managerial procedures, practices reflecting on artistic labor pervade the art of the 20<sup>th</sup> century: the assembly line aesthetics of the

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<sup>2</sup> There have been a number of critiques of Abstract-Expressionism's gestural heroism, on how Ab-Ex's expressive individualism was coopted as Cold War propaganda, see: Max Kozloff, "American Painting during the Cold War," *Artforum* 11 (May 1973): 43–54; Eva Cockcroft, "Abstract Expressionism, Weapon of the Cold War," *Artforum* 12 (June 1974): 39–41; and Jane de Hart Mathews, "Art and Politics in Cold War America," *American Historical Review* 81 (October 1976): 762–67. Abstract-Expressionism's rhetoric of individual freedom was also used in service of neoliberalism, see: Serge Guibault, "The New Adventures of the Avant-Garde in America: Greenberg, Pollock, or from Trotskyism to the New Liberalism of the 'Vital Center,'" *October* 15 (Winter 1980): 61–78; Frances K. Pohl, "An American in Venice: Ben Shahn and United States Foreign Policy at the Venice Biennale or Portrait of the Artist as an American Liberal," *Art History* 4 (March 1981): 80–113. For feminist critiques of Abstract-Expressionism's masculinist rhetoric, see: Anna C Chave, "Pollock and Krasner: Script and Postscript," *Res*, 1993, 95–111; Michael Leja, *Reframing Abstract Expressionism: Subjectivity and Painting in the 1940s* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993), 253–68; 363–64; and Ann Eden Gibson, *Abstract Expressionism: Other Politics* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997).

<sup>3</sup> Caroline Jones's important book, *Machine in the Studio*, traces how the postwar artists Frank Stella, Andy Warhol, and Robert Rauschenberg fashioned themselves as blue-collar workers and corporate managers, see *Machine in the Studio: Constructing the Postwar American Artist* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006). Helen Molesworth's exhibition *Work Ethic* is also an essential resource, especially her introductory catalogue essay, which examines how the artistic embrace of labor challenged the historic role of the artist, see "Work Ethic," in *Work Ethic*, ed. Helen Molesworth (Baltimore: Baltimore Museum of Art, 2003). Julia Bryan-Wilson's *Art Workers* is also foundational, the author argues that, for some artists, the reconceptualization of their practice as labor was a political act and helped spur artistic activism in the Vietnam War era, see *Art Workers: Radical Practice in the Vietnam War Era* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009).

Duchampian readymade;<sup>4</sup> Warhol's self-fashioning as a "Business Artist;"<sup>5</sup> minimalism's serialized industrial style;<sup>6</sup> process art's emphasis on production procedures;<sup>7</sup> conceptual art's "aesthetic of administration;"<sup>8</sup> and institutional critique's research-based protocols<sup>9</sup> all challenged the artist's presumed distance from forms of capitalist labor. As postwar artists embraced other forms of labor, they fundamentally redefined the role of the artist, as Helen Molesworth has argued:

Even though artists embraced these new anti authorial modes of artistic production, they did so at some peril. Were artists still required, in any subjective or authorial specificity? (Anyone can follow through a serial system, click the shutter on a camera, throw a pair of dice.) If not, what exactly was their role? What was to constitute their labor? This was

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<sup>4</sup> Helen Molesworth argues that Duchamp's readymades reconfigured industrial objects to remove their functionality, challenging the rationalized efficiency of Taylorist working processes, see Helen Molesworth, "Work Avoidance: The Everyday Life of Marcel Duchamp's Readymades," *Art Journal* 57, no. 4 (1998): 50–61.

<sup>5</sup> Warhol famously adopted the title Business Artist, in characteristically dry Warholian wit, the artist proclaimed, "Business art is the step that comes after Art. I started as a commercial artist, and I want to finish as a business artist. After I did the thing called 'art' or whatever it's called I went into business art. I wanted to be an Art Businessman or a Business Artist." (Andy Warhol, *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol: From A to B and Back Again* [New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975], 92).

<sup>6</sup> Among the minimalists, Julia Bryan-Wilson argues that Carl Andre "went the furthest to actualize the claims of industrially made art," the artist claimed that his interventions were secondary to the manufacturing process, "insist[ing] on the (somewhat self-evident) point that he had no part in the making of his objects see "Carl Andre's Work Ethic," in *Art Workers: Radical Practice in the Vietnam War Era* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 48.

<sup>7</sup> Briony Fer, *The Infinite Line: Re-Making Art After Modernism* (Yale University Press, 2004).

<sup>8</sup> Benjamin Buchloh introduced the term "aesthetic of administration" to describe those conceptual art practices that "mimed the operating logic of late capitalism and its positivist instrumentality" (Benjamin Buchloh, "Conceptual Art 1962-1969: From the Aesthetic of Administration to the Critique of Institutions," *October* 55 [Winter 1990]: 143).

<sup>9</sup> Alexander Alberro notes that this research was often presented in easily digestible forms, mirroring the aesthetic of commercial advertising, "in the process of adjusting their work to easily disseminated distribution forms and to existing conditions of reading and seeing competence, these artists inadvertently began to produce art that crossed the border into the realm of pure publicity" (Alexander Alberro, "Institutions, Critique, and Institutional Critique," in *Institutional critique: an anthology of artists' writings*, ed. Blake Stimson and Alexander Alberro [Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2009], 13).

felt particularly keenly in the visual arts, where one effect of the ebbing of the authorial role was that the resultant art was often only tenuously an object.<sup>10</sup>

Taking on other forms of work, postwar artists grappled with how to define their activities *as art*.

The managerial mindset forms a central departure point for this dissertation. Generally, management refers to a set of techniques for rationalizing labor and maximizing profit. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Frederick W. Taylor popularized a form of “scientific management” that used time and motion studies to analyze workers and increase efficiency.<sup>11</sup> At the time, managers often had little contact with workers and were unfamiliar with their tasks, Taylorism reinvented managerial work, putting the scientific study and optimization of labor under its purview.<sup>12</sup> Inspired by Taylorist principles, the automobile manufacturer Henry Ford streamlined production by introducing the assembly line, which divided workers into different stations to perform single repetitive tasks.<sup>13</sup> Ford’s key contribution was to link production to consumerism, using management protocols to reduce the costs of his product to a price that his own workers

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<sup>10</sup> Molesworth, “Work Ethic,” 31.

<sup>11</sup> See Frederick W. Taylor, *The Principles of Scientific Management* (New York: Harper and Bros., 1911). The body of scholarship on Taylorism is expansive, some of the best overviews include, Frank Barkley Coley, *Frederick W. Taylor: Father of Scientific Management*. 2 2 (London; New York: Routledge, 1993); Daniel Nelson, *Frederick W. Taylor and the Rise of Scientific Management* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1980). For an in-depth case study of Taylorism in the American workplace, see Hugh G. J Aitken, *Taylorism at Watertown Arsenal: Scientific Management in action 1908-1919* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960). On the distinctions between Taylorism and post-industrialism see Daniel Bell, *The Coming Of Post-Industrial Society* (New York: Basic Books, 1976); David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1990).

<sup>12</sup> As David Harvey describes, Taylorism constituted a new organization of labor, characterized by the “separation between management, conception, control, and execution.” (Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*, 125–26). Thus, the management sector grew substantially under Taylorism to meet the need for greater conception and control of working processes.

<sup>13</sup> For an early critique of Fordism see Antonio Gramsci, “Americanism and Fordism,” in *An Antonio Gramsci Reader: Selected Writings, 1916-1935*, ed. David Forgacs (New York: Schocken Books, 1988), 275–99.

could afford. Thus, Fordism also applies to a particular mode of consumption, characterized by the proliferation of cheaply produced goods accessible to the working class. Taylorist production models, based on the manufacture of goods, largely defined the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup>-century. However, during the postwar period, the management sector expanded once again to accommodate the shift to a service-based economy.<sup>14</sup> This dissertation looks specifically at the period of the 1990s, a time when many of the transformations in the field of work in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century become acutely visible: the shift to a postindustrial workforce; the expansion of communication networks; the rise of immaterial labor and service-based work; and the emergence of the experience economy profoundly altered our understanding of what it means to work. At the same time that artistic labor adopted managerial procedures, management practices turned to the artistic personality as a means of reinvigorating the stultifying sphere of postindustrial office work. Against the bureaucracy of administrative work, a new managerial type emerges, characterized by adaptability, creativity, collaboration, and participation.

These transformations have had considerable impact on the ways in which artists conceive of their labor. As the sphere of work absorbs qualities typically associated with the artistic personality, artists must ask, “What is the good of work?” The question is Liam Gillick’s and it points to the dilemma facing artists working today, as he elaborates, “The accusation inherent in the question is that artists are at best the ultimate freelance knowledge workers and at

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<sup>14</sup> In the 1940s, James Burnham described a revolution in economic conditions that would fundamentally alter capitalism, concentrating control over the means of production into the hands of a newly emerging social class: managers, see James Burnham, *The Managerial Revolution; What Is Happening in the World* (New York: John Day, 1941). In a now canonical book, C. Wright Mills provides an essential sociological study of the American managerial class, see C. Wright Mills, *White Collar: The American Middle Classes* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1951). For criticisms of the social hegemony and conformity of managerial class, see William Hollingsworth Whyte, *The Organization Man* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1956); David Riesman, *The Lonely Crowd: A Study of the Changing American Character*, 1950.

worst barely capable of distinguishing themselves from the consuming desire to work at all times, neurotic people who deploy a series of practices that coincide quite neatly with the requirements of the neoliberal, predatory, continually mutating capitalism of the every moment.”<sup>15</sup> My project follows Gillick and Huyghe as they work to distinguish their labor from creative-knowledge work in the service of some kind of feel-good, infinitely flexible, neoliberal management scenario. Working within the compromised sphere of neoliberal management, Gillick and Huyghe develop strategies for imagining the future differently.

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While their practices are quite distinct, as young artists Gillick and Huyghe formulated their approaches in close dialogue with one another. The artists first exhibited together in the 1994 show *Surface de Reparation*, curated by Eric Troncy at the FRAC Bourgogne, Dijon. The following year, Gillick and fellow artist Phillippe Parreno curated the exhibition *Moral Maze*, which included Huyghe as a participant.<sup>16</sup> Organized at Le Consortium, Dijon, *Moral Maze*

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<sup>15</sup> Liam Gillick, “The Good of Work,” *E-Flux* 16 (May 2010), <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/16/61277/the-good-of-work/>.

<sup>16</sup> Notably, many of the artists’ early activities happened outside of major art world centers such as Paris, London, or New York. In France, newly established funding for regional contemporary art spaces enabled cities such as Dijon to become hubs for a young generation of artists and curators. Curator Eric Troncy explains, “In ’83, Jack Lang created a centre d’art label [Fonds Régional d’Art Contemporain (FRAC), a regional subsidy for contemporary art] to provide a legal framework for initiatives that until then had nothing of the kind. Back then, people would graduate from the university saying, “Well, we’ve studied art history, but we’re really interested in the art of our own time! We want to show it. We want to show the art that’s currently being made, contemporary art. But how?” In the France of the early ’80s, you couldn’t... there was no place for contemporary art in the museums. And, of course, no budget for subsidies.” (Eric Troncy and Olivier Zahm, “Interview,” *Purple*, no. 24 [Fall/Winter 2015], <https://purple.fr/magazine/fw-2015-issue-24/eric-troncy/>).

challenged the presumption of the exhibition as a space of leisure and called into question the role of the artist as an experiential service provider.<sup>17</sup> Instead of creating visual objects for the show, the artists focused on formalizing administrative procedures to sustain their collaboration beyond the run of the exhibition. For example, Gillick's contribution to the show, a work also titled *Moral Maze*, consisted of painting the normally transparent glass doors at the exhibition's entrance with a whitewash, giving the appearance that the galleries were closed [Figure 0.1]. While the space technically remained open to the public, this would not have been immediately apparent to most visitors. The move transformed the experience of the exhibition into something more akin to a private seminar. For six days, the artists invited individual experts—political strategists, advertisers, educators, and the like—to a trial, where each person was asked to testify and defend their position in response to a day long series of questions posed by the artists. For his contribution to the exhibition, Huyghe founded the Association of Freed Time, an official business registered with the French government and dedicated to “the development of unproductive time.”<sup>18</sup> Organizing a private seminar and registering a corporation, the activities

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<sup>17</sup> As curator Helmut Draxler and artist Andrea Fraser have observed, artists are increasingly expected to perform services for institutions, immaterial labor which often goes uncompensated due to the problematic conflation of artistic labor with leisure activities. Draxler and Fraser explain, “While curators are increasingly interested in asking artists to produce work in response to specific existing or constructed situations, the labor necessary to respond to those demands is often not recognized or adequately compensated.” (Helmut Draxler and Andrea Fraser, “Services: A Proposal for an Exhibition and a Topic of Discussion,” in *Games, Fights, Collaborations: The Game of Boundary and Transgression*, ed. Beatrice von Bismarck, Diethelm Stoller, and Ulf Wuggenig [Stuttgart: Cantz, 1996], 196).

<sup>18</sup> The participating artists included Angela Bulloch, Maurizio Cattelan, Liam Gillick, Carsten Höller, Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster, Douglas Gordon, Jorge Pardo, Philippe Parreno, Rikrit Tiravanija, and Xavier Veilhan. Huyghe's project has roots in the Situationist critique of commodified leisure time. In some respects, the Association's embrace of “unproductive time” would seem to heed Guy Debord's call for “the withering away of the social measurement of time in favour of a federation of independent times—a federation of playful individual and collective forms of irreversible time that are simultaneously present.” (Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Ken Knabb [London: Rebel, 2005], 92). However, working at a

of *Moral Maze* show how even early on Gillick and Huyghe were articulating their artistic practices in relation to management.



Figure 0.1. Liam Gillick, *Moral Maze*, 1995, painted glass doors.

Huyghe’s association provided the structure for subsequent artistic collaborations, most notably *No Ghost Just a Shell*. Initiated in 1999, the project began when Huyghe and fellow artist Philippe Parreno purchased the copyright to an animated character from K-Works, a Japanese manga agency. Designed to be used in animated films, video games, or comic books, the relatively inexpensive, nondescript stock character came with minimal features. The artists named their character Annlee and began inserting the figure into films, sculptures, installations, and books. Huyghe and Parreno also leased Annlee to other artists asking them to create their own stories for the character. In response, Gillick created *Annlee You Proposes* (2001), a film and installation developed for Tate Britain [Figure 0.2]. In subsequent years, Gillick and Huyghe continued to intersect in a number of contexts, including *Vicinato 2* (2000), a film collaboratively

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considerable distance from the nascent moment described by Debord, Huyghe is much more skeptical about whether or not this kind of independence is at all possible, the artist explains, “We must dispel one received idea and that is that the spectacle is a fatalism, inherently alienating. The spectacle is a format, it is a way to do things...Spectacle has always been linked with illusion, with manipulation, with the culture industry. It is though a format and a way of doing things that can be taken and appropriated, and used for other purposes.” (George Baker and Pierre Huyghe, “An Interview with Pierre Huyghe,” *October* 110 [October 2004]: 104).

written with Douglas Gordon, Carsten Höller, Philippe Parreno, and Rirkrit Tiravanija; *Utopia Station* (2003), a project for the Venice Biennale; and the group exhibition *Theanyspacewhatever* (2008), at the Guggenheim Museum, New York.



Figure 0.2. Liam Gillick, *Annlee You Proposes*, 2001, painted aluminum, lights, and computer animation.

Much of the critical dialogue surrounding these activities was hashed out through debates in the pages of *Documents sur l'art*, a journal founded by curators Nicolas Bourriaud and Eric Troncy and artists Philippe Parreno and Liam Gillick. Most notably, Bourriaud published a series of essays in the journal that would lay the foundation for his book *Relational Aesthetics*, published in 1998. Bourriaud introduced the term 'relational aesthetics' to describe "an art taking as its theoretical horizon the realm of human interactions and its social context rather than the assertion of an independent and *private* symbolic space."<sup>19</sup> Identifying practices that emphasized

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<sup>19</sup> Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics* (1998; repr., Dijon: Les Presses du réel, 2002), 14. Alternatively called conversational art, relational art, or dialogical art, critics have emphasized the role of discussion in the contemporary artistic practices that emerged in the 1990s. For conversational art, see Homi Bhabha, "Conversational Art," in *Conversations at the Castle*:

social interaction, Bourriaud described an emerging sensibility among artists of the 1990s, who turned to “convivial, user-friendly artistic projects, festive, collective and participatory...”<sup>20</sup> Putting less emphasis on the art object, relational works consisted of “meetings, encounters, events, various types of collaboration between people, games, festivals, and places of conviviality, in a word all manner of encounter and relational invention.”<sup>21</sup> In Bourriaud’s formulation, the social relationships created in gallery spaces were de facto political, challenging alienated forms of social interaction in our everyday life. As he explained, “[Relational art] creates free areas, and time spans whose rhythm contrasts with those structuring everyday life, and it encourages an inter-human commerce that differs from the ‘communication zones’ that are imposed upon us.”<sup>22</sup>

During the 1990s, participation and collaboration emerge as key themes in the discourse surrounding contemporary art. Of course, socially engaged and participatory art practices have a long history that precedes the 1990s—Futurist theater, the Dadaist cabaret, Situationist actions, Beuys’s social sculpture, Happenings, Fluxus, and performance art all eroded distinctions

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*Changing Audiences and Contemporary Art*, ed. Mary Jane Jacob and Michael Brenson (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1998), 38–49. As Bhabha describes, “It is by contesting the primacy of reason and its visual analogue that conversation shrinks the distance between subject and object and shatters the cultural silence around the art object...the conversational perspective is...more deeply committed to, the ethical and political ‘choice’ that contingency forces us to be responsible for” (Bhabha, 42). For dialogical art, see Grant Kester, *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004). Kester uses dialogic to highlight the “open-ended and liberatory possibility...in the very process of communication” Kester, 90. See also, Shannon Jackson, *Social Works Performing Art, Supporting Publics* (New York: Routledge, 2011); Claire Bishop, “The Social Turn: Collaboration and Its Discontents,” *Artforum International*, 2006, 178–83; Miwon Kwon, *One Place after Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2002).

<sup>20</sup> Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, 61.

<sup>21</sup> Bourriaud, 28.

<sup>22</sup> Bourriaud, 16.

between audience and maker, foregrounding collaboration, interactivity, and social relationships.<sup>23</sup> The turn to experiential art reflects a wider transformation in the field of artistic practice that extends back to at least the mid-twentieth century, a moment when artists began to shift their attention from the art object to the art experience—that is, the situation in which viewers encounter a work of art. Traces of the experiential lingered in the gesturalism of postwar Abstract Expressionist painting, famously described by Harold Rosenberg as “as an arena in which to act...not a picture but an event.”<sup>24</sup> While, in the case of abstract painting, this event remained confined to the canvas, in the late 1950s artists associated with Happenings began to conceive live actions experienced in real space and time. Allan Kaprow distinguished Happenings from theatrical performances precisely because of their immersive, experiential quality, the artist declared that “audiences should be eliminated entirely. All the elements—people, space, the particular materials and character of the environment, time—can in this way be integrated. And the last shred of theatrical convention disappears.”<sup>25</sup> Similarly, artists associated with Minimalist sculpture embraced the durational aspect of their work, as Robert

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<sup>23</sup> For an extensive history of precursors to participatory art, see Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (New York: Verso, 2014). See also Claire Bishop, *Participation* (London: Whitechapel, 2010); Gregory Sholette and Blake Stimson, *Collectivism after Modernism: The Art of Social Imagination after 1945* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007); Kester, *Conversation Pieces*; Jackson, *Social Works Performing Art, Supporting Publics*; Tom Finkelpearl, *What We Made: Conversations on Art and Social Cooperation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), <https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822395515>; Claire Doherty, *Contemporary Art: From Studio to Situation* (London: Black Dog, 2004).

<sup>24</sup> Harold Rosenberg, “The American Action Painters,” *ARTnews* 51, no. 8 (December 1952): 22.

<sup>25</sup> Allan Kaprow, “Assemblages, Environments and Happenings,” in *The Twentieth Century Performance Reader.*, ed. Teresa Brayshaw and Noel Witts (Hoboken: Taylor and Francis, 2013), 260–70. Notably, Kaprow argued that Happenings were entirely incompatible with theater or museum spaces, “The most intense and essential Happenings have been spawned in old lofts, basements, vacant stores, natural surroundings, and the street.” Allan Kaprow, “Happenings in the New York Scene,” *Art News* 60, no. 3 (1961): 36–39, 58–62; Reprinted in *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, ed. Jeff Kelley (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 17.

Morris described, “images, the past tense of reality, begin to give way to duration, the present tense of immediate spatial experience.”<sup>26</sup> The critic Michael Fried harshly condemned the

Minimalist (he used the dismissive term ‘literalist’) turn to experience:

The beholder is made aware of the endlessness and inexhaustibility if not of the object itself at any rate of his experience of it...everything he observes counts as part of that situation and hence is felt to bear in some way that remains undefined on his experience of the object...the experience in question persists in time, and the presentment of endlessness which, I have been claiming, is central to literalist art and theory is essentially a presentment of endless, or indefinite, duration.<sup>27</sup>

For Fried, the experiential quality of Minimalism threatened the modernist critic’s capacity for aesthetic judgement. If the Minimalist object remained incomplete prior to the spectator’s encounter with it, then the experience of the work was unique to each viewer, “that the beholder is confronted by literalist work within a situation which he experiences as his, means that there is an important sense in which the work in question exists for him alone, even if he is not actually alone with the work at the time.”<sup>28</sup> Minimalism’s achievement, then, was to completely transform our understanding of the subject who perceives art. No longer a disembodied spectator, Minimalism foregrounded the immediacy of lived bodily experience. Despite Fried’s protestations, the art that followed would take this tenet—that the work exists for its beholder and is only complete when he experiences it—as nearly axiomatic. The theatrical qualities that Fried ascribed to Minimalist art—situation, experience, and duration—would come to dominate

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<sup>26</sup> Robert Morris, “The Present Tense of Space,” in *Continuous Project Altered Daily: The Writings of Robert Morris* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1993), 176.

<sup>27</sup> Michael Fried, “Art and Objecthood,” *Artforum* 5 (June 1967): 22. Fried illustrated this experiential turn by recounting minimalist artist Tony Smith’s description of a drive on the unfinished New Jersey turnpike, writing, “It is the explicitness, that is to say, the sheer persistence, with which the experience presents itself as directed at him from outside (on the turnpike from outside the car) that simultaneously makes him a subject—makes him subject—and establishes the experience itself as something like that of an object, or rather, of objecthood” (Fried, 20).

<sup>28</sup> Fried, “Art and Objecthood,” 21.

the field of artistic production in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century: Joseph Beuys' theory of social sculpture,<sup>29</sup> the do-it-yourself ethos of Fluxus scores,<sup>30</sup> Land art's phenomenological focus,<sup>31</sup> performance art's emphasis on lived experience,<sup>32</sup> video art's preoccupation with feedback,<sup>33</sup> public art's community-based focus,<sup>34</sup> the near ubiquity of installation art,<sup>35</sup> and the codification

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<sup>29</sup> Beuys argued for breaking down the boundaries between art and lived experience, so that “every living person becomes a creator, a sculptor, or architect of the social organism” (Joseph Beuys, “I Am Searching for Field Character,” in *Art into Society, Society into Art: Seven German Artists*, ed. Christos M. Joachimides and Norman Rosenthal [London: Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1974], 48). For an in-depth discussion of Beuys's theory of social sculpture see Gene Ray, *Joseph Beuys: Mapping the Legacy* (New York: D.A.P., 2001).

<sup>30</sup> Fluxus scores provided instructions for making or performing the artwork that could be performed by anyone, democratizing the art-making experience. Hannah Higgins, *Fluxus Experience* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); Natilee Harren, *Fluxus Forms: Scores, Multiples, and the Eternal Network* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2020).

<sup>31</sup> On Land art, see Rosalind Krauss, “The Double Negative: A New Syntax for Sculpture,” in *Passages in Modern Sculpture* (New York: The Viking Press, 1977), 243–88; Suzaan Boettger, *Earthworks: Art and the Landscape of the Sixties* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 2002); Kwon, *One Place after Another*; Robert Smithson, George Baker, and Lynne Cooke, *Robert Smithson: Spiral Jetty: True Fictions, False Realities* (Berkeley, Calif.: Dia Art Found, 2005); Jennifer L Roberts, *Mirror-Travels: Robert Smithson and History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004).

<sup>32</sup> On performance art, see RoseLee Goldberg, *Performance: Live Art 1909 to the Present* (New York: H.N. Abrams, 1979); Amelia Jones, *Body Art / Performing the Subject* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998); Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (New York: Routledge, 1993); Carrie Lambert-Beatty, *Being Watched: Yvonne Rainer and the 1960s* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2011); Elise Archias, *The Concrete Body: Yvonne Rainer, Carolee Schneemann, Vito Acconci* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016).

<sup>33</sup> David Joselit, *Feedback: Television against Democracy* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2010).

<sup>34</sup> On community-based public art, see Suzanne Lacy, *Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1996); Hal Foster, “The Artist as Ethnographer,” in *The Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1996), 171–203; Kester, *Conversation Pieces*; Kwon, *One Place after Another*.

<sup>35</sup> Claire Bishop describes that installation art foregrounds the viewer's experience, “Rather than imagining the viewer as a pair of disembodied eyes that survey the work from a distance, installation art presupposes an embodied viewer whose senses of touch, smell and sound are as heightened as their sense of vision. This insistence on the literal presence of the viewer is arguably the key characteristic of installation art.” (Claire Bishop, *Installation Art* [London: Tate Publishing, 2005], 6). See also, Julie H Reiss, *From Margin to Center the Spaces of Installation Art* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2001); Mark Rosenthal, *Understanding Installation Art: From Duchamp to Holzer* (London: Prestel, 2003).

of participatory art as “relational aesthetics” all speak to contemporary art’s heightened attention to the direct engagement with the situation and experience of audiences.<sup>36</sup>

What distinguishes the period of the 1990s is the degree to which these values are embedded into the logic of the capitalist workplace and commercial market. Remarkably, many of the qualities that Bourriaud identifies with relational art can likewise be found in 1990s management discourse. In response to growing dissatisfaction with the tedium of administrative work, management literature began to covet the expressivity that had once been the purview of the artistic avant-garde.<sup>37</sup> As management scholars Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello describe,

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<sup>36</sup> By the early 2000s, experience had so saturated the biennial circuit, that many exhibitions began to take up the question of experience as a central thematic. As Caroline Jones argues, “the shift from object to experience codified in installation art became the canon of twenty-first-century biennial culture in part because the immersive experiences thus fostered meet our most fervent desires to know a complex, anthropological world in an experiential way.” (Caroline A. Jones, *The Global Work of Art: World’s Fairs, Biennials, and the Aesthetics of Experience* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017], 237). Caroline Jones points to the 2005 Lyon Biennial, *Expérience de la durée*, curated, once again, by Nicolas Bourriaud, along with Jérôme Sans. In their essay on the exhibition’s concept, the curators explain, “We became aware of the importance of the issue of art as experience—the sharing or co-management of a duration between the artist and the spectator-participant.” (Nicolas Bourriaud and Jérôme Sans, *Expérience de La Durée: Biennale de Lyon* [Paris: Paris musées, 2005], 45).

<sup>37</sup> A number of scholars have examined the relationship between the managerial and artistic mindset. In *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello offer an in-depth study of changes in management literature over the course of the twentieth-century. Their research shows that management gradually adopts principles associated with the artistic critique of capitalism. In their book, *L’esthétisation du monde*, Gilles Lipovetsky and Jean Serroy introduce the concept of aesthetic capitalism (capitalisme artistique) to describe the ways in which contemporary capitalism intermingles and is coextensive with aesthetics. They write: “We are in are in a new cycle [of capitalism] marked by a relative lack of differentiation between economic and aesthetic spheres, by the removal of distinctions between economics and aesthetics, industry and style, fashion and art, entertainment and culture, commerce and creativity, mass culture and high culture: henceforth, in economies of hypermodernity, these spheres hybridize, mingle, short-circuit, and interpenetrate.” (Gilles Lipovetsky and Jean Serroy, *L’esthétisation du monde: vivre à l’âge du capitalisme artiste* [Paris: Gallimard, 2016], 12 [my translation]). Relatedly, Richard Caves examines the ways in which creative industries have adopted management strategies, see Richard E Caves, *Creative Industries: Contracts between Art and Commerce* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002). Additionally, the journal *e-flux* has been a voracious producer of scholarship in this area, see especially Liam

the artistic critique of capitalism challenged “on the one hand, the disenchantment, the inauthenticity, the ‘poverty of everyday life’, the dehumanization of the world under the sway of technicization and technocratization; on the other hand, the loss of autonomy, the absence of creativity, and the different forms of oppression in the modern world.”<sup>38</sup> Challenging the rigid hierarchical style of 1950s management discourse, 1990s management literature began to embrace a new managerial type characterized by “adaptation, change, [and] ‘flexibility’;”<sup>39</sup> collaborative networks replaced authoritarian hierarchy, projects with shifting tasks alleviated the tedium of assembly line work, and customizable experiences supplanted standardized commodities. If, the 1950s managerial personality was synonymous with the bureaucratic, authoritarian, and conformist ‘organization man’, by the 1990s management embraces the flexible and adaptable ‘network man’, defined by “his mobility, his ability to move around without letting himself be impeded by boundaries, whether geographical or derived from professional or cultural affiliations, by hierarchical distances, by differences of status, role, origin, group, and to establish personal contact with other actors, who are often far removed socially or spatially.”<sup>40</sup> This new mode of management emphasizes the quality of relationships

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Gillick’s writings: “The Good of Work”; “Maybe It Would Be Better If We Worked in Groups of Three? Part 1 of 2: The Discursive.” See also: Elvia Wilk, “The Artist-in-Consultance: Welcome to the New Management,” *E-Flux*, no. 74 (June 2016), <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/51/59958/the-new-way-of-the-world-part-i-manufacturing-the-neoliberal-subject/>; Martha Rosler, “Culture Class: Art, Creativity, Urbanism, Part II,” *E-Flux*, no. 23 (March 2011), <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/23/67813/culture-class-art-creativity-urbanism-part-ii/>; and Pierre Dardot and Christian Laval, “The New Way of the World, Part I: Manufacturing the Neoliberal Subject,” *E-Flux*, no. 51 (January 2014), <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/51/59958/the-new-way-of-the-world-part-i-manufacturing-the-neoliberal-subject/>.

<sup>38</sup> Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Gregory Elliott (London: Verso, 2005), 170.

<sup>39</sup> Boltanski and Chiapello, 71.

<sup>40</sup> Boltanski and Chiapello, 79.

between people, developed through teamwork, collaboration, and participation. As Boltanski and Chiapello describe, the successful manager “relies on his *communication* skills, his *convivial* temperament, his *open* and *inquiring* mind...he knows also how to *give of himself*, to be there as and when appropriate, to exploit his *presence* in personal relations, in face-to-face encounters...he possesses ‘a strategy for conducting relationships, a kind of *self-monitoring* that results in an aptitude for producing signs which can *facilitate contacts*’ ... know[s] how to engage, but also [is] *able to engage others*, to offer involvement.”<sup>41</sup> The new managerial mode that emerges in the 1990s relies increasingly on affective forms of labor, what theorists Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri have described as those forms of immaterial work involved with “the production and manipulation of affects” that “requires (virtual or actual) human contact and proximity.”<sup>42</sup>

This is especially true for the service sector, which has placed greater emphasis on developing experiential encounters. As famously introduced by the management specialists B. Joseph Pine and James H. Gilmore, the “experience economy” has come to identify a new stage in economic offerings that emphasizes participation and collaboration. As Pine and Gilmore explain, experiences should incorporate “active participation” in which “customers play key roles in creating the performance or event that yields the experience” and establish “connection” by creating an environment “that unites customers with the event or performance.”<sup>43</sup> This study considers the striking similarities between the rhetoric of the experience economy and the

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<sup>41</sup> Boltanski and Chiapello, 114.

<sup>42</sup> Michael Hardt, “Affective Labor,” *Boundary 2* 26, no. 2 (1999): 97. For a detailed sociological study of affective labor see Arlie Russell Hochschild, *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

<sup>43</sup> James H. Gilmore and B. Joseph Pine, “Welcome to the Experience Economy,” *Harvard Business Review*, no. July–August 1998 (July 1, 1998): 101.

contemporaneous turn to experiential practice in art museums, examining the ways in which artists have engaged with experience and participation in innovative ways. Against the clarity of the experience economy's convivial engagement, I attended to works that are multivocal and disidentifying, incomplete or deferred, or simply boring.

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It is no longer possible to assume that art operates at an autonomous distance from managerial labor. More and more, today's artists work beyond the confines of museums, engaging a range of fields, including publishing, graphic design, copyright law, urban planning, and ecology. Undoing simplistic narratives of artistic subversion and cooptation, the dissertation seeks to uncover the ways in which artists absorb, metastasize, expand, rearticulate, or promote the strategies of neoliberal management. The dissertation's four chapters look closely at key projects by Liam Gillick and Pierre Huyghe that bring these issues into relief. Throughout, I describe how the artists' practices intersect with strategic planning, management jargon, quarterly projections, hyperflexible scenarios, business contracts, teamwork, and experience development. While eroding distinctions between work and leisure define the period in question, the chapters of the dissertation are guided by certain moments of inflection, where the themes of work and leisure become particularly acute. The first two chapters consider Gillick's engagement with the shifting terrain of managerial labor in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Chapter one considers Gillick's work as a response to the decline of modernist planning and the seeming loss of utopian vision. Amid this sense of resignation, Gillick suggests that the flexibilized space of corporate management might be the best place to locate something of modernism's utopian imagination.

The second chapter takes an in-depth look at Gillick's *Discussion Island* project, examining the artist's employment of scenario planning, a strategic management tool for projecting the near future. Examining Gillick's work alongside the history of Cold War think tanks, I trace a genealogy for the collaborative, team-based, and future-oriented tactics that characterize the workplace and participatory art. The last two chapters of the dissertation consider the shifting terrain of leisure and consumption, focusing in particular on the "experience economy" and its effects on contemporary art practices and institutions. In chapter three, I examine Pierre Huyghe's *Streamside Day*, a festival organized for a suburban community in upstate New York. Here, I argue that Huyghe mobilizes suburban melancholy and the affect of boredom to challenge the good-time atmosphere typically expected from participatory art. The final chapter considers Huyghe's work with biological systems, following the artist as he develops fictional scenarios that spill over into real living environments. Examining two monumental environmental projects, I argue that Huyghe's biotopes foreground temporalities of persistence, maintenance, and living on that place experience outside the quickly consumed temporal mode of the experience economy. Rather than a broad overview of an artistic generation or movement, my study privileges close study of specific works by two artists working in the context of the US and Western Europe. It is my hope that this narrow context opens up broader questions about how contemporary artists conceive of their roles within museums, institutions, and economies. Ultimately, in a situation in which "it has become difficult to identify a true and final barricade,"<sup>44</sup> the contemporary artist might abandon his role as utopian visionary, adopting a

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<sup>44</sup> Liam Gillick, *Maybe It Would Be Better If We Worked in Groups of Three? (Hermes Lecture)* (Breda: Hermes, 2008), 23.

posture nearer to 'strategic managing consultant of the near future'. We need not mourn or denigrate this compromised position, but rather find ways of recognizing it.

## Chapter One: Liam Gillick's 'What If? Scenario'

Liam Gillick is managed. Asked to perform work at the behest of others, the artist consults, analyzes, troubleshoots, negotiates and compromises to complete commissions for corporations, municipalities, and art museums. Over the course of his career, Gillick has renovated the Guggenheim Museum's café, designed the façade of London's Home Office, produced signage installed on the pillars of Lufthansa's headquarters, completed an installation for the Fort Lauderdale airport, crafted an architectural canopy for the Centene Corporation, collaborated on a display for Dior Homme's fitting rooms, developed a line of sweaters and handbags for clothier Pringle of Scotland, devised text for the curtain wall façade of the Fairmont Hotel, designed a seating area for Dekabank's Frankfurt office, produced transit maps for the London Underground, and created fixtures for the lobby of Telenor, a Norwegian telecom company [Figure 1.1]. Working within "the vast central area that includes bureaucracy, compromise, conciliation, and so on,"<sup>1</sup> Gillick positions himself in the role of middle manager, collaborating with city planners and corporations—those entities that decide how things get made—to contribute solutions that may not be permissible through normal bureaucratic avenues.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Liam Gillick, "Discussion Island: Big Conference Center," in *All Books* (1997; repr., London: Book Works, 2009), 147.

<sup>2</sup> Bureaucracy is a frequent subject in Gillick's practice, government think tanks, factory assembly lines, and corporate strategists feature prominently in projects like *Discussion Island*, *Literally No Place*, and *Construcción de Uno*. In these works, historical figures associated with bureaucracy such as Director of the RAND Institute, Herman Kahn, and Secretary of Defense, Robert McNamara, confronts the changing terrain of bureaucracy in our contemporary moment. By the mid-twentieth century, the palpable effects of bureaucracy on the individual became a major subject of sociological inquiry, for accounts of modern bureaucracy see: Max Weber, "Bureaucracy," in *Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, ed. H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946), 196–244; Whyte, *The Organization Man*; Mills, *White*

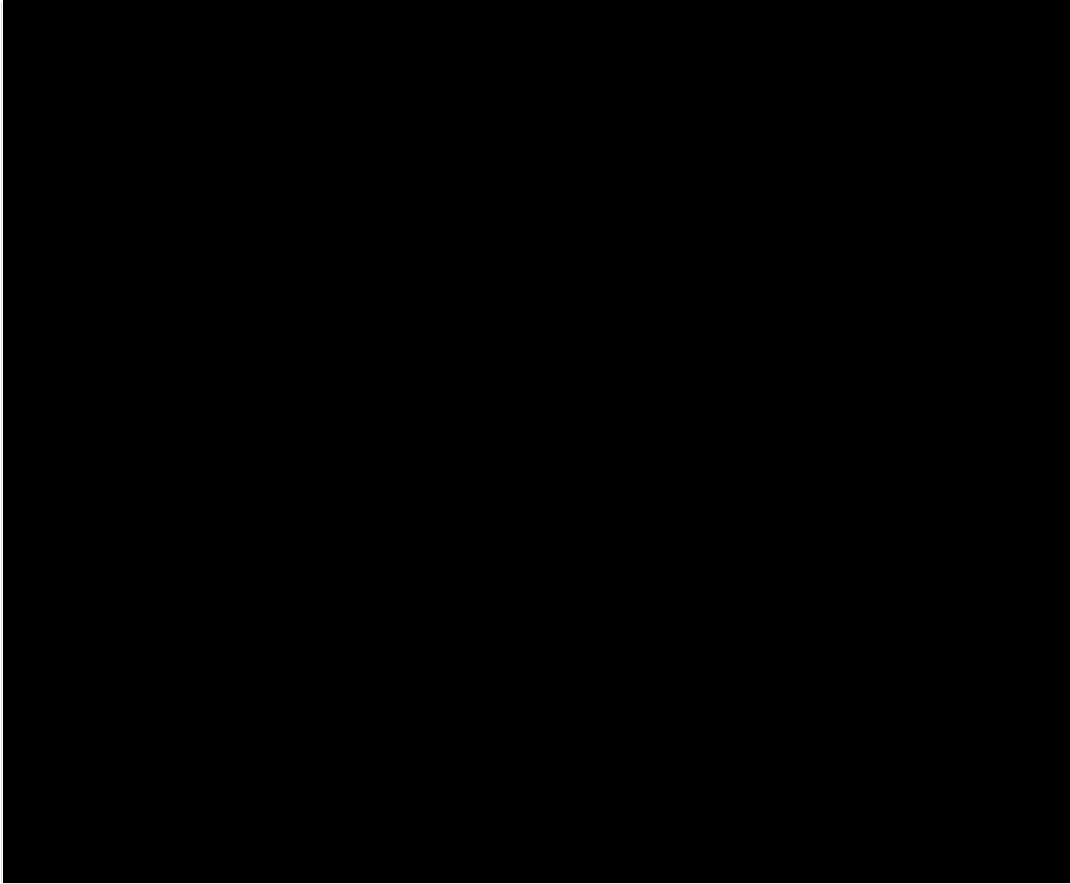


Figure 1.1. Selections of Liam Gillick's collaborations. Left to right, top to bottom: Liam Gillick, Guggenheim Museum café, 2009; Home Office, London, 2002-2005, mixed media; *Four Levels of Exchange*, 2005, Lufthansa Headquarters, Frankfurt-am-Main; *Idea Horizons*, 2003, ink and vinyl, Fort Lauderdale Hollywood International Airport, Fort Lauderdale, Florida; Centene Plaza, 2010, St. Louis, Missouri; Liam Gillick with Sean Deck, *Fitting Room*, 2004, stickers on mirrors, Dior Homme, Changhai, China; Liam Gillick for Pringle of Scotland, 2011; *Lying on Top of a Building...The Clouds Looked no Nearer than when I Was Lying on the Street...*, 2010, stainless steel, Fairmont, Pacific Rim, Vancouver; *Applied Discussion Platform*, 2003, powder-coated aluminum, Dekabank, Frankfurt-am-Main; *The day before (you know what they'll call it, they'll call it the tube)*, 2006, offset lithographic prints, standard London Underground map, Transport for London, London Underground; *Conciens Lobby*, 2001, painted aluminum, glass, dimensions variable, Telenor, Oslo, Norway.

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*Collar: The American Middle Classes*; Michel Crozier, *The Bureaucratic Phenomenon* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964). These studies focus on the archetype of the 1950s businessman, a figure driven by conformity, described by Theodor Adorno et al.'s study of the "authoritarian personality" (Theodor W Adorno, *The Authoritarian Personality* [New York: Harper, 1950]). In these accounts, bureaucracy is characterized by fixed organizational plans, hierarchical management structures, and clearly defined occupational roles. In this sense, bureaucratic institutions are guided by the desire for stability, predictability, and planning.

Throughout his practice, Gillick employs a consistent visual repertoire—typically brightly colored Plexiglas, powder-coated aluminum, unfinished pine wood, and sans-serif text—drawing comparisons with conference centers, office lobbies, and airport kiosks.<sup>3</sup> Reacting against the staid bureaucratic feel of Gillick’s environments, critics have described the artist’s practice as “a kind of corporate *feng shui*,”<sup>4</sup> “the ideal flexi-time, feel-good office,”<sup>5</sup> a “pan-European logo bore,”<sup>6</sup> a “trendy mausoleum,”<sup>7</sup> the “visual equivalent to Prozac,”<sup>8</sup> and “decorative discourse art...sleek, conformist and politically correct.”<sup>9</sup> The critical reaction to Gillick’s practice relies on a number of assumptions: that art maintain a critical distance from the

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<sup>3</sup> Critics associate Gillick’s style with forms of commercial design. Adam Platt describes Gillick’s Guggenheim restaurant design as like “a first-class dining lounge at the airport in Macau” (Adam Platt, “Off Wright,” *New York Magazine*, February 10, 2010, <http://nymag.com/restaurants/reviews/63762/>). Marcus Verhagen suggests that Gillick’s “clean lines and bright colors” recall “contemporary corporate design and flat-pack furniture.” (Marcus Verhagen, “Conceptual Perspex,” in *Meaning: Liam Gillick*, ed. Monika Szewczyk [Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2009], 47). Mike Dawson notes the “resemblance to office spaces, bus shelters, meeting rooms and canteens.” (Mike Dawson, “Liam Gillick,” *Flux*, September 2002, 63). Ina Blom compares Gillick’s style to “the slick partitions, screens, and signage systems of business and media environments, or the colorful and emphatically inventive design solutions often found in schools, playgrounds, and community centers.” (Ina Blom, “Liam Gillick’s Sociality,” in *Theanyspacewhatever*, ed. Nancy Spector [New York: Guggenheim Museum, 2008], 51). Sean Keller notes that the screens suggest “office partitions, library shelving, and IKEA furniture.” (Sean Keller, “Liam Gillick: Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago,” *Artforum International* 48, no. 8 [April 2010]: 188).

<sup>4</sup> Max Andrews, “Liam Gillick,” *Contemporary Visual Arts* 32 (2000): 73.

<sup>5</sup> Adrian Searle, “Road to Nowhere,” *The Guardian*, May 14, 2002, sec. Art and design, <https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2002/may/14/artsfeatures.turnerprize2002>.

<sup>6</sup> Waldemar Januszczak, “The Turner Prize Short List Is Embarrassingly Light on Talent,” *Sunday Times*, November 3, 2002, <http://www.thesundaytimes.co.uk/sto/culture/article217179.ece>.

<sup>7</sup> Sven Lütticken, “(Stop) Making Sense,” in *Meaning: Liam Gillick*, ed. Monika Szewczyk (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2009), 29.

<sup>8</sup> Sean O’Hagan, “This Is Not an Art Gallery,” *The Observer*, May 5, 2002, 10.

<sup>9</sup> Gesine Borchardt, “Total Daneben,” *Monopol*, August 2008, 26; quoted in Isabelle Moffat, “Liam Gillick’s Lure, Or ‘Why Do You Tell Me You Are Going To Cracow So I’ll Believe You Are Going To Lvov, When You Are Really Going To Cracow?’,” in *Liam Gillick: one long walk-- two short piers* (Cologne: Snoeck, 2010), 25.

institutions of corporate culture, and that the artist occupies a privileged role as cultural trailblazer who may lead such resistance. This logic underlies the warning given by critic Julian Stallabrass, who has cautioned, “In making work that seeks less to document than to exemplify the ideological and aesthetic action of bureaucracy on the world, the danger is that the art becomes indistinguishable from its subject.”<sup>10</sup> Similarly, Claire Bishop has dismissed Gillick’s work for failing to maintain its critical distance from the institutions that support it:

Gillick’s titles reflect this movement away from the directness of 1970s critique in their use of ironically bland management jargon: *Discussion Island*, *Arrival Rig*, *Dialogue Platform*, *Regulation Screen*, *Delay Screen*, and *Twinned Renegotiation Platform*. These corporate allusions clearly distance the work from that of [Dan] Graham, who exposed how apparently neutral architectural materials (such as glass, mirror, and steel) are used by the state and commerce to exercise political control. For Gillick, the task is not to rail against such institutions, but to negotiate ways of improving them.<sup>11</sup>

Directness of critique, exposure, railing against institutions—Bishop’s language mimes the very triumphalism Gillick intends to problematize.

Assumptions about art’s place vis-à-vis management account for the many criticisms levied at Gillick’s work. More specifically, Gillick addresses the ways in which the close relationship between artistic labor and work has all too often been used as evidence of a work’s failure. Gillick counters, “the question ‘What is the good of work?’ is at the heart of the work—it is not a symptom or product of accidental proximity.”<sup>12</sup> The artist continues:

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<sup>10</sup> Julian Stallabrass, *Art Incorporated: The Story of Contemporary Art*, 1st ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 121.

<sup>11</sup> Claire Bishop, “Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics,” *October* 110 (2004): 53. In his response to Bishop’s essay, Gillick points out that his proposal attempted to keep the company from encroaching on a public plaza, the plan was rejected by Porsche who chose to go with “an artist who restricted herself to the surface of the street” (Liam Gillick, “Contingent Factors: A Response to Claire Bishop’s ‘Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics,’” *October* 115 [2006]: 104).

<sup>12</sup> Gillick, “The Good of Work.”

The reason it is hard to determine observable differences between the daily routines and operations of a new knowledge-worker and those of an artist is precisely because art functions in close parallel to the structures that it critiques...If the question ‘Why work?’ is the original question of current art, it is necessary, in order to counter the accusation that artists are in thrall to processes of capitalization beyond them, to look at a number of the key issues around control. And to address them in a fragmented way.<sup>13</sup>

This chapter responds to Gillick’s call. Methodologically, this means following those areas of control that run parallel to Gillick’s artistic practice. The reader will permit, I hope, brief excursions on the Keynesian welfare state, the development of scenario planning, and the rise of neoliberalism, as these stories set the stage for how we arrive at the urgent conditions addressed in Gillick’s work. As Gillick explains:

Art is not a zone of autonomy. It does not create structures that are exceptional or perceivable outside their own context. Therefore current art will always create a sequence of problems for the generally known context. For example, with regard to the undifferentiated flexible knowledge-worker who operates in permanent anxiety in the midst of a muddling of work and leisure, art both points at this figure and operates alongside him or her as an experiential phantom.<sup>14</sup>

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*If you are not entirely happy with the way things are then the options are no longer clear. Ironic non-belief is an accepted stance now, so where do you look to for action? One option is to try and address the vast central area that includes bureaucracy, compromise, conciliation and so on. Not to illustrate those things, but to address them. To look carefully at the mechanics of our political and economic context without resorting to irony or distance. Not to make that vast compromised central area into a subject but to move inside the thinking and add to the confusion.*<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Gillick, “Maybe It Would Be Better If We Worked in Groups of Three? Part 1 of 2: The Discursive.”

<sup>14</sup> Gillick, “The Good of Work,” 7.

<sup>15</sup> Gillick, “Discussion Island,” 147.

If the capacity to project the self into the future has come under crisis, Liam Gillick develops models for thinking the future differently. Gillick's practice is motivated by the frustration of being an artist of a certain generation for whom the utopian projects outlined by the avant-garde seem to have failed and there is no clear recipe for how artists move forward. The project of modernism was associated with the construction of utopias, as Susan Buck-Morss has argued:

The construction of mass utopia was the dream of the twentieth century. It was the driving ideological force of industrial modernization in both its capitalist and socialist forms. The dream was itself an immense material power that transformed the natural world, investing industrially produced objects and built environments with collective, political desire...this collective dream dared to imagine a social world in alliance with personal happiness, and promised to adults that its realization would be in harmony with the overcoming of scarcity for all.<sup>16</sup>

In contrast to this utopian imaginary, Gillick describes the present moment as 'post-utopian,' meaning that, today, any attempts to imagine the future are generally derided as unrealistic and naïve:

In the hands of neo-liberal pragmatists, utopia has come to describe any art movement, architectural moment, political system or communal proposition that doesn't operate within the terms of modern capitalism. 'Utopian' is the term that refers to the desire for something that is impractical, because it levels and implies harmony, while sidestepping the generalized, lurching linearity of the dominant system.<sup>17</sup>

That is, utopia became an accusation, meant to discredit certain kinds of future-oriented imaginations. But, Gillick reminds, decisions about the future continue to be made.

In a situation, in which we have been told that the alternative visions of the future proposed by the progressive Left are impractical, who controls the central area in which

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<sup>16</sup> Susan Buck-Morss, *Dreamworld and Catastrophe: The Passing of Mass Utopia in East and West* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2002), ix.

<sup>17</sup> Liam Gillick, "Utopia Station: For a ... Functional Utopia," in *Proxemics: Selected Writings 1988-2006*, ed. Lionel Bovier (Dijon: Les Presses du reel, 2006), 280.

decisions are made about the future? For Gillick, no other structure embodies this central area of control better than the scenario. The 1998 essay, “Prevision: Should the Future Help the Past,” remains Gillick’s clearest articulation of this central area of control.

There is a fundamental gap between societies that base their development on scenarios and those that base their development on planning. It could be argued that the great Cold War divide in socio-economic structuring was rooted in the different kinds of results that you get if you apply either one or the other technique to working out how things might end up in the future. And it is claimed that scenario thinking won. Our vision of the future is dominated by the ‘What If?’ scenario rather than the ‘When Do We Need More Tractors?’ plan.<sup>18</sup>

Here, the artist argues that twentieth-century visions of the future were dominated by two distinct approaches: planning and speculation. Planning proceeds from the notion that careful study of the present can help generate an accurate forecast of the future. For instance, in Gillick’s example, the ‘When Do We Need More Tractors?’ plan would use past data about tractor use to decide how many tractors to manufacture for the next quarter. Scholars have typically used the term Fordism as shorthand to describe this mode of accumulation—where estimates of future demand determine present production. Eventually, the logic of planning, and its drive to bring the future under rational control, gives way to the speculative ethos of the scenario. Economists use the term Toyotism to describe the flexibilized system of accumulation that supplants Fordism in the late twentieth century:

The mass production of standardized commodities in the Fordist era could count on an adequate demand and thus had little need to ‘listen’ to the market... Toyotism is based on an inversion of the Fordist structure of communication between production and consumption. Ideally, according to this model, production planning will communicate with markets constantly and immediately. Factories will maintain zero stock, and commodities will be produced just in time according to the present demand of the

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<sup>18</sup> Liam Gillick, “Prevision: Should the Future Help the Past?,” in *Proxemics: Selected Writings 1988-2006*, ed. Lionel Bovier (Dijon: Les Presses du reel, 2006), 193.

existing markets.<sup>19</sup>

Characterized by “just-in-time” manufacturing, Toyotism develops production processes that can adapt to future scenarios, which are held to be unpredictable. As I discuss in greater detail below, the transition from planning to speculation has fostered an increasingly precarious relation to the future. If the regime of planning entailed “a ‘rational’ domination of the future [and] the elimination of the risk it brings with it,”<sup>20</sup> the present mode of speculation is primarily motivated by risk. Rather than bring the future under rationalized control, the scenario advocates flexibility and mobility, so that one can rapidly adapt to the precarious terrain of the future.

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*Where I grew up they used to dredge the river every now and then, digging out the mud and putting it by the side of the river. I suppose they were making the river deeper. I always thought they were cleaning it. (This is a sign of my tragic suburban mentality – “Oh, they are cleaning the river, that’s nice!”) But of course they were making it deeper so that boats could still use it.*<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000), 290. For a detailed account of Toyota’s production strategies see Dohse Knuth, Ulrich Jürgens, and Thomas Nialsch, “From ‘Fordism’ to ‘Toyotism’? The Social Organization of the Labor Process in the Japanese Automobile Industry,” *Politics and Society* 14, no. 2 (June 1985): 115–46. On Toyotism see also: Manuel Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society* (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishers, 1996). Changes in production practices were necessitated by the oil shocks in the 1970s, which showed Fordism’s long-term planning model to be unsustainable. Rigid Fordist production schemes were unable to adapt to abrupt changes in supply and demand, flexible and adaptable schemes were devised in response, see, David Harvey, “From Fordism to Flexible Accumulation,” in *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1990), 145.

<sup>20</sup> Manfredo Tafuri and Barbara Luigia La Penta, *Architecture and Utopia: Design and Capitalist Development* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press), 52.

<sup>21</sup> Liam Gillick, “Claiming Contingent Space,” in *Curating with Light Luggage: Reflections, Discussions and Revisions*, ed. Liam Gillick and Maria Lind (Frankfurt am Main: Revolver, 2005), 86.

Liam Gillick was born in 1964 in the London suburb of Aylesbury. He decided at a young age to confront the tedium of his “boring environment” by becoming active in the anti-nuclear movement.<sup>22</sup> Throughout the late seventies and early eighties, Gillick’s involvement with the movement brought him into contact with the radical leftist politics that would later influence his art practice. Early on, Gillick thought that he might work for the Labour Party in some capacity:

I wanted to study law and philosophy so that I could become an activist. I had big teenage working-class delusions, and I still have them.<sup>23</sup>

I didn’t come from a background where I wanted to do art, I came from a background where I wanted to do something very concrete, to work for the Labour movement. To do that thing that people from a working class background often want to do; which is, given the chance to education, you then use that to make up for the perceived hurt that you feel your forefathers, mothers, sisters, and brothers had. I actually went to art school because they cancelled my course.<sup>24</sup>

As Gillick tells it, the desire to work for Labour was born out of a particular sense of obligation to his working class background.<sup>25</sup> However, by the time Gillick decided to intern for a summer

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<sup>22</sup> Liam Gillick, “Liam Gillick Die Uneingepasste Küche: Ein Gespräch von Heinz-Norbert Jocks,” *Kunstforum International* 198 (2009).

<sup>23</sup> Kathleen Hefty, “Liam Gillick: Phantom Structures,” *Muse*, March 2016, <http://www.musemagazine.it/liam-gillick/>.

<sup>24</sup> Liam Gillick, Video Interview for FLY 16x9, date unknown, <http://www.fly16x9.com/art/index.php?id=71>.

<sup>25</sup> Labour had traditionally been the party of the working classes and, as such, carried a certain aura of humble nobility. Postwar studies of the British working class emphasized the heroic and resilient character of working men. See for example, Richard Hoggart’s *The Uses of Literacy* (1957), which celebrated the working class propensity for “‘straight-dealing’, ‘good neighbourliness’, ‘looking on the bright side’, ‘openness’, ‘lending a helping hand’, ‘not being stuck-up or a getter-on’, [and] ‘loyalty’.” (Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy: Aspects of Working-Class Life* [London: Penguin, 2009], 346). Hoggart’s working-class fellow was

at a law office, the triumphant image of the Labour party had begun to wane, the artist explains, “One of the notable elements of those Labour years in opposition, from 1979 to 1997, was that, by 1983, a new generation of people felt that Labour were never going to win an election unless they changed their image and strategy. Stop exposing the decision process to open scrutiny. Dump planning and start juggling scenarios.”<sup>26</sup> Leading Labour theorists began to question the left’s relationship to socialism, “Social democracy was always linked to socialism. What should its orientation be in a world where there are no alternatives to capitalism? [...] Does being on the left retain any meaning now that communism has foundered completely in the West and socialism more generally has been dissolved?”<sup>27</sup> Discarding the socialist foundations of the party, the opposition rebranded itself as ‘New Labour’—a blend of conservative free market economics and a more liberal approach to social issues.<sup>28</sup> Gillick’s self-avowed working-class

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forthright, hard working, and loyal—nothing short of heroic: “He is the big, fat, round-faced, middle-aged man with a pint of ale...He is the real working-class hero, the cheerful, not the romantic, hero” (Hoggart, 286). While Hoggart avoids political affiliations, subsequent accounts emphasize the collective spirit of the working class. In *Culture and Society* (1958), Raymond Williams argued that working class culture was explicitly collective and political in nature, attached to “the basic collective idea, and the institutions, manners, habits of thought and intentions which proceed from this...The culture which [the working class] has produced, and which it is important to recognize, is the collective democratic institution, whether in the trade unions, the cooperative movement or a political party.” (Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society, 1780-1950*. [New York: Columbia University Press, 1958], 346).

<sup>26</sup> Gillick, “Prevision: Should the Future Help the Past?,” 210–11.

<sup>27</sup> Anthony Giddens, *The Third Way: The Renewal of Social Democracy* (Malden, Mass.: Polity Press, 2000), 24.

<sup>28</sup> Proposing a ‘Third Way’, Blair outlined an alternative approach to the rigid schemes offered by the right and left: “In each area of policy a new and distinctive approach has been mapped out, one that differs both from the solutions of the old left and those of the Conservative right. This is why new Labour is new...we recognise also that the policies of 1997 cannot be those of 1947 or 1967...The old left would have sought state control of industry. The Conservative right is content to leave all to the market. We reject both approaches.” (Tony Blair, “New Labour, Because Britain Deserves Better,” in *Labour Party General Election Manifestos, 1900-1997*, ed. Iain Dale [1997; repr., New York: Routledge, 2000], 347).

identity and frequent mentions of wanting to work for Labour are tinged with nostalgia, signaling the artist's continued attachment to the social democratic idea, even as it seems to be in crisis.<sup>29</sup>

While Gillick frequently references his working class background, he does so in the context of explaining his newly acquired suburban identity:

Someone like me, who grew up in the suburbs, always carried a class identification that was very new. This includes, in my case, knowing that my father in order to make money for the family, had left school at the age of 15, and that his father was working at the age of 12 in a coal mine.<sup>30</sup>

And:

There is a subplot in my work that is related to cultural specificity in a very kind of white, straight, middle-class, suburban way.<sup>31</sup>

These positions are not contradictory for Gillick, rather they reflect historically specific transformations that the artist has had to come to terms with—the shift from planning to speculation, the rise of the postindustrial managerial class, the decline of the Keynesian welfare state, and the emergent precariousness of 'Third Way' neoliberalism.

The artist has insisted that his 'tragic suburban mentality' is the key to understanding his art, but what is the tragedy of suburban life? And, how does this tragic element manifest in contemporary art? There is an undercurrent to Gillick's work that mourns the loss of artistic

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<sup>29</sup> Gillick self-identifies as a "European socialist", see Liam Gillick, "It's Interesting That You, with Your Values, Would Ask Me a Question Like This," *Filip 7* (Winter 2008), <http://fillip.ca/content/its-interesting-that-you-with-your-values>.

<sup>30</sup> Gillick, "Liam Gillick Die Uneingepasste Küche: Ein Gespräch von Heinz-Norbert Jocks."

<sup>31</sup> Liam Gillick, *Liam Gillick Talking about His Work, Including His Work in the Exhibition "Intelligence,"* Audiocassette (Tate Britain, 2000), TAV 2258A, Tate Library and Archive.

heroism; a sense of impotency and resignation is embedded in Gillick's reference to a 'tragic suburban mentality'. At times, the artist stubbornly lays claim to artistic heroism—in flights of narrative lyricism, attempts at recuperating the language of modernist planning, and faithful commitment to the promises of the social democratic welfare state. Yet, Gillick continues to undermine his own claims to artistic subjectivity—as the artist collaborates with corporations and institutions, he adopts a role nearer to middle management consultant. However, the managerial figure harbors his own, peculiarly felt, affective disposition—described by the artist as “the potentially neurotic, anxiety-provoking situation within which we find cultural producers operating.”<sup>32</sup> This chapter is most broadly about the artistic response to this condition; what happens when the artist's special role as heroic cultural critic is threatened by the declining distinction between the artist and the permanently part-time, creative knowledge worker?

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For someone who identified strongly with Labour and believed whole-heartedly in the social democratic project of the Left, it was not easy to make art in the late eighties. Between 1984 and 1987, Gillick attended London's Goldsmiths College with a number of artists known as the young British artists.<sup>33</sup> Abbreviated as “yBa,” the label refers to a group of artists—many

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<sup>32</sup> Liam Gillick, “Maybe It Would Be Better If We Worked in Groups of Three? Part 2 of 2: The Experimental Factory,” *E-Flux*, no. 3 (February 2009), <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/03/68522/maybe-it-would-be-better-if-we-worked-in-groups-of-three-part-2-of-2-the-experimental-factory/>.

<sup>33</sup> Gillick's colleagues at Goldsmiths included the artists Damien Hirst, Gary Hume, and Sarah Lucas. On Goldsmiths College and Young British Art see: Jon Thompson, “The Economic of Culture: The Revival of British Art in the 80s,” in *Public Offerings*, ed. Paul Schimmel and Yilmaz Dziewior (Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, 2001), 208–19.

graduates of Goldsmiths—who came to prominence in Britain during the late 80s and early 90s, including Damien Hirst, Gary Hume, Tracey Emin, and Sarah Lucas.<sup>34</sup> Coming at the tail end of Margaret Thatcher’s Conservative Party government, the yBas emerged during the economic recession of the late 1980s.<sup>35</sup> Declining state funding and a bursting art market bubble pushed young artists to forge new paths to success. Their efforts were aided by the recession, which saw many of London’s industrial zones abandoned, leaving a number of disused factories that could be made into exhibition spaces. Held in a former London Port Authority building, the 1988

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The Fine Art program at Goldsmiths College became synonymous with the yBa phenomenon. Nearly half of the 42 artists included in *Sensation* were Goldsmiths alumni. For a detailed history of the yBas, see Julian Stallabrass, *High Art Lite: The Rise and Fall of Young British Art* (London: Verso, 2006). Grant Pooke describes the general phenomenon of young British art and gives detailed accounts of specific practices, see: Grant Pooke, *Contemporary British Art: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2011). Thomas Crow details the relationship between art criticism and the yBas, see: Thomas E. Crow, “A Novelist among Artists: Gordon Burn and ‘Young British Art,’” in *Fictions of Art History*, ed. Mark Ledbury (Williamstown, MA: Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 2013), 21–33.

<sup>34</sup> Indicative of its market-driven impulse, the yBa sobriquet gained traction in the popular press, but was rarely adopted by any of the artists associated with it. The label remains somewhat ambiguous, given that the yBas subscribed to “no common programme...no manifestos, no group statements, no shared style” (Stallabrass, *High Art Lite*, 4). Stallabrass has argued that it is better to think of the group in terms of shared social ties, “Many of the artists...went to the same art schools, showed in the same do-it-yourself exhibitions, were represented by the same dealers, came to the public’s attention at about the same time, live in the same part of London and socialise together.” (Stallabrass, 3). Many of the artists associated with the phenomenon have since disavowed its significance. See Richard Shone, “From ‘Freeze’ to House: 1988-94,” in *Sensation: Young British Artists from the Saatchi Collection* (London: Thames and Hudson in association with the Royal Academy of Arts, 1998), 17.

<sup>35</sup> Thatcher’s policies had a drastic effect on arts funding in Britain, Thatcher’s Arts Minister, Norman St-John Stevas, urged arts organizations to seek private funding, warning that the state would no longer provide sufficient financial backing: “The arts world must come to terms with the situation and accept the fact that Government policy in general has decisively tilted away from the expansion of the public to the enlargement of the private sector. The Government fully intends to honour its pledge to maintain public support for the arts as a major feature of policy, but we look to the private sphere to meet any shortfall and to provide immediate means of increase.” [Quoted in Robert Hewison, *The Heritage Industry: Britain in a Climate of Decline* (London: Methuen London, 1987), 112]. For more on the declining funding for the arts during Thatcher’s tenure, see Hewison, *The Heritage Industry*.

exhibition *Freeze*, organized by the artist Damien Hirst, is generally cited as the origin of the yBa phenomenon.<sup>36</sup> The unconventional venue—an abandoned warehouse in London’s East End—added to the mythical allure of the yBas and cemented their reputation as art-world outsiders [Figure 1.2].<sup>37</sup> Likewise, the enterprising nature of the student-organized exhibition marked a newly professionalized class of artists. Hirst, a second-year student, secured commercial sponsorship for the exhibition from the London Docklands Development Corporation, solidifying the market-savvy reputation of the yBa generation.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> *Freeze* was exhibited in three parts over the summer of 1988, the sixteen artists included in the show were Steven Adamson, Angela Bulloch, Mat Collishaw, Ian Davenport, Angus Fairhurst, Anya Gallaccio, Damien Hirst, Gary Hume, Michael Landy, Abigail Lane, Sarah Lucas, Lala Meredith-Vula, Richard Patterson, Simon Patterson, Stephen Park, and Fiona Rae.

<sup>37</sup> In the wake of *Freeze*, a number of exhibitions followed suit and occupied disused industrial spaces, these include: *Modem Medicine* (1990) and *Gambler* (1990), curated by Damien Hirst, Carl Freedman, and Billee Sellman, held at Building One, a former biscuit factory in Bermondsey; *Market* (1990), curated by Michael Landy, also at Building One; and *East Country Yard Show* (1990), curated by Henry Bond and Sarah Lucas, held in an abandoned building at Surrey Dock. In reality, similar spaces had been used in London for exhibiting art since at least the late 1960s. Numerous objections to the alternative and outsider reading of Young British Art have been raised in the pages of the British journal *Art Monthly*. Well before *Freeze* was initiated, Goldsmiths own Michael Craig-Martin described that “enormous spaces in old industrial buildings were opened as galleries” to accommodate conceptual art in the 60s and 70s (Michael Craig-Martin, “Reflections on the 1960s and Early ’70s,” *Art Monthly*, no. 114 [March 1988]: 5). And, around the same time as Hirst’s exhibition, Deanna Petherbridge complained that “although art beyond the gallery had been a movement...for artists to escape the confines of institutions and the commercial world, it was fast being appropriated by curators acting as entrepreneurs in the field.” Deanna Petherbridge, “Making Space--Art Projects Beyond the Gallery,” *Art Monthly*, no. 115 (April 1988): 29. Petherbridge’s remarks were made in response to a conference on alternative art venues held at the ICA on February 20, 1988.

<sup>38</sup> Thatcher’s government created the London Docklands Development Corporation in 1981 to revitalize the Docklands area of East London. Hirst also secured funding for a professional catalogue from the property developers, Olympia and York. In total, Hirst claims to have gotten £10,000 from Olympia and York and £4000 from the LDDC (Gordon Burn and Damien Hirst, *On the Way to Work*, (London: Faber & Faber, 2001): 44). Hirst made sure that prominent art critics and collectors visited the show, offering to drive them to the Docklands (Norman Rosenthal, “The Blood Must Continue to Flow,” in *Sensation: Young British Artists from the Saatchi Collection* [London: Thames and Hudson, 1998], 9).

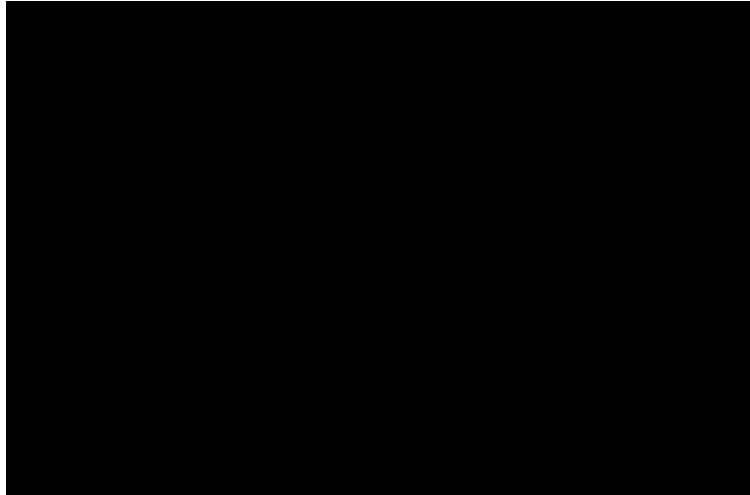


Figure 1.2. Damien Hirst and others prepare for the *Freeze* exhibition in 1988.

The yBas fashioned themselves as working-class rebels, an image that played well in the press. Critics dubbed Damien Hirst the “working-class hero” of young British art and the artist’s biographical details—born in Leeds, several scuffles with the law, a former construction worker—were used to bolster the claim. Critical accounts cultivated an image of Hirst as “the working-class lad who gulls the toffs and makes them like it”<sup>39</sup> and the “quick-witted, dirty-minded, hard-drinking, and immensely likeable Yorkshire-man whose tough, working-class features look as though they could turn belligerent at some point.”<sup>40</sup> Although these characterizations were mostly drawn from Hirst’s tabloid reputation, the ‘bad boy’ image also shaped the reception of his art—Hirst’s matter-of-fact one-liners seemed to rebel against Britain’s parochial past.

The yBas became cultural emblems of a new Britain—young, irreverent, and embracing the free market. As art critic Simon Ford has described, “The myth of the yBa seeks to instill in

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<sup>39</sup> Peter Schjeldahl, “Spot On: Damien Hirst’s Global Show,” *The New Yorker*, January 23, 2012, <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2012/01/23/spot-on>.

<sup>40</sup> Calvin Tomkins, “Damien Hirst,” in *Lives of the Artists* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 2010), 1.

its audience a sense of national identity which is where myth fades into ideology. This group has been utilised as cultural ambassadors representing and defining ‘British’ culture abroad. It is promoted as entrepreneurial, opportunist, confident, resourceful, independent, and non-political, representing Britain in full ‘enterprise culture’ bloom.”<sup>41</sup> Elected in 1997, Tony Blair latched on to this imagery and used its rhetoric to legitimize his policies at home and abroad. Thatcher had pitted Labour as rear-guard, outdated, and impractical, and so, Blair pledged to “modernis[e] the Labour Party” and “modernise Britain.”<sup>42</sup> Blair’s 1997 party manifesto framed the debate as a battle between old and new, promising “a new and revitalised Labour Party...resolute in transforming itself into a party of the future.”<sup>43</sup> As New Labour abandoned the socialist bedrock of the party, it abandoned many of the policies that benefited the working class. The party substituted its economic base with a cultural affiliation based on a nebulous ‘working-class attitude’—emblemized by the yBa’s rebel image.

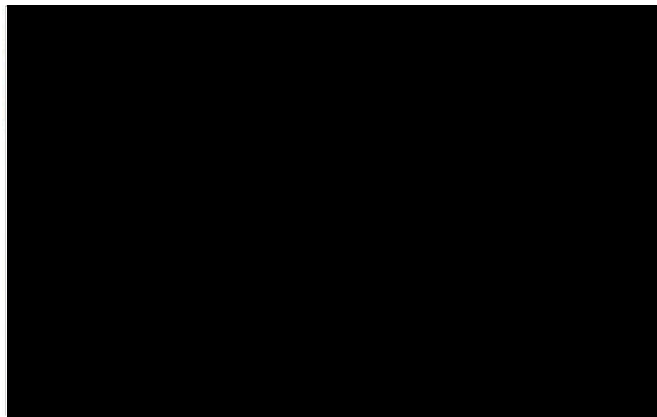


Figure 1.3. Tony Blair and Noel Gallagher of Oasis at an official reception held at No. 10 in July 1997.

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<sup>41</sup> Simon Ford, “Myth Making,” *Art Monthly*, no. 194 (March 1996): 5.

<sup>42</sup> Blair, “New Labour, Because Britain Deserves Better,” 349.

<sup>43</sup> Blair, 346.

Accessible and easily read, young British art was praised for its anti-establishment, populist message.<sup>44</sup> Blair publicly associated himself with Britain's creative industries, staging events where he could be photographed shaking the hands of pop stars such as Oasis' Noel Gallagher [Figure 1.3]. Meanwhile, the government's Design Council hired London-based think tank Demos to propose a plan for rebranding Britain. The report, "Britain™: Renewing Our Identity," argued that the UK's reputation, mired in tradition, had become stodgy and outdated; "Britain's image remains stuck in the past...Britain is seen as a backward-looking has-been."<sup>45</sup> A vital factor in recovering Britain's identity would be embracing the creative industries. Highlighting Britpop musicians like the Spice Girls, fashion icons like model Kate Moss and designer Alexander McQueen, and artists like Damien Hirst and David Hockney, features in popular magazines—including *Newsweek*, *Vanity Fair*, and *Vogue*—helped to unify disparate cultural activities in the public imaginary as a single phenomenon, marketed as 'Cool Britannia' [Figure 1.4].<sup>46</sup> The rebellious attitude of Cool Britannia was cast in cultural terms and explicitly depoliticized. When asked about its anti-authority, punk inspired ethos, Tony Blair confidently declared, "the important point is not their politics, but the fact that they are part of a new and exciting cultural renaissance in this country."<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> The populist image could perhaps account for the many "scandals" that accompanied the yBas in Britain. Sold as working-class champions, the public outcry over works like Rachel Whiteread's *House* challenged young British art's claims to populism.

<sup>45</sup> Mark Leonard, *Britain TM: Renewing Our Identity* (London: Demos, 1997), 1.

<sup>46</sup> See Stryker McGuire, "London Rules: Inside the World's Coolest City," *Newsweek*, November 4, 1996, 50–53; David Kamp, "London Swings! Again!," *Vanity Fair*, March 1997, 102–27; "Special Issue: Best of British," *Vogue*, June 1998.

<sup>47</sup> Quoted in Stallabrass, *High Art Lite*, 195.

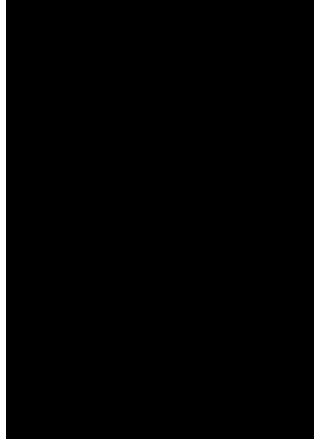


Figure 1.4. Model Kate Moss and musician Liam Gallagher on the cover of *Vanity Fair*, March 1997.

Notably, Gillick did not participate in many of the exhibitions that concretized the yBa movement and has rejected the label.<sup>48</sup> The artist has been highly critical of the vapid profundity of young British art, proclaiming, “The base of their work was fundamentally devolved to a post-modern emptying out of imagery around the idea of sex, death and power...the ideologies and the ideas that backed-up their approaches seem to be always somewhat appropriate to any time. You could be working in Ghent in 1320 and say, ‘I’m interested in sex and death’. It is hard to not see this return to ‘fundamentals’ as part of a neo-conservative tendency.”<sup>49</sup> Distancing his work from this tendency, Gillick explains, “My work is not an ironic reference to the failure of modernism. I, in my maybe naive way, felt very strongly attracted to what frankly in the mid-eighties in London was a rather marginalized period, which was the period of high

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<sup>48</sup> Speaking of the yBas Gillick describes, “We all completely disagreed. There is some sense in which I’m from the same generation of those people but I never really understood what their work was about”(Gillick, Video Interview for FLY 16x9). Gillick contends that he was much more influenced by the international art scene than by the situation in Great Britain; the artist characterizes the work being popularized in the UK as “English formalist bullshit, all look and no content. The visual equivalent of a discarded Monty Python sketch”(Liam Gillick, “When Are You Leaving?,” *Art & Design*, May 1995, 81).

<sup>49</sup> Cliff Lauson, “Separate But Not Marginal,” *Third Text* 22, no. 2 (March 1, 2008): 275.

modernism.”<sup>50</sup> Gillick makes these references quite explicit and critics have frequently remarked on Gillick’s citation of modernism’s formal language. Sven Lutticken notes that Gillick’s forms “hark back to the industrial design and the modernist and Minimalist art of the 1960s”<sup>51</sup> and then goes on to cite Mondrian, Color Field painting, and Minimalism as possible reference points. Likewise, critic Bill Roberts writes that Gillick’s works “invok[e] minimalism and earlier modernist previsions of utopia, notably De Stijl, as their historical antecedents. Riveted powder-coated aluminium and painted steel frames recall Donald Judd, and the abutment of brightly coloured geometric Plexiglas planes in his ‘screens’ and ‘platforms’ brings to mind Piet Mondrian and Theo van Doesburg.”<sup>52</sup>

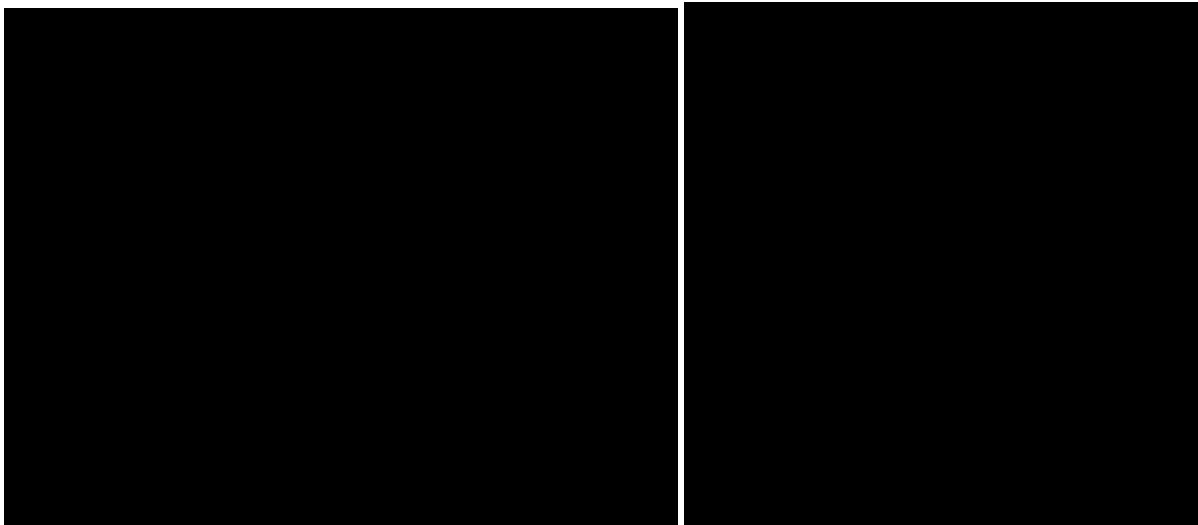


Figure 1.5. *Donald Judd, 1985 and New York Art Now, 1987*, Saatchi Collection, London.

As young British artists appropriated the visual vocabulary of modernist abstraction, they laid bare its failed autonomy—its inability to escape the lexicon of corporate logos, circuit

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<sup>50</sup> *Donald Judd, Lecture, with Haim Steinbach, Moderated by Mark Godfrey*, Audiocassette (Tate Britain, 2004), TAV 2876A, Tape 1/2, Tate Library and Archive.

<sup>51</sup> Lütticken, “(Stop) Making Sense,” 34.

<sup>52</sup> Bill Roberts, “Burnout: Liam Gillick’s Post-Fordist Aesthetics,” *Art History* 36, no. 1 (2013): 7.

boards, and the abstract language of the commodity. Goldsmiths teacher Jon Thompson notes that two of earliest shows at the Saatchi Gallery in London [Figure 1.5]: the inaugural exhibition of Minimalism in 1985 and the 1987 Neo-Geo exhibition *New York Art Now* shaped the attitudes of Goldsmiths students:

Firsthand experience of major works by Donald Judd, Brice Marden, and Richard Serra, previously accessible only through magazines and catalogues, taught them something about a way of ‘thinking’ and ‘making’, while the Neo-Geo artists Ashley Bickerton, Robert Gober, and Jeff Koons—as well as fueling their desire to be sharp and stylish—demonstrated a way of referencing the world without representing it.<sup>53</sup>

It was through Neo-Geo’s rhetoric of failed modernist abstraction that the yBas would seize upon a “kind of phony abstract” style with “no essential core of meaning.”<sup>54</sup> According to Thompson, the Saatchi shows helped students develop “a distinctive flavor to the Goldsmiths brand of irony...[that] would seem to subsist in the pretense that as long as works of art look thoroughly at home in the current ‘commodity-scape’, they can simply lie doggo and that’s enough.”<sup>55</sup>

Gillick also recalls the impact of the Saatchi shows during his time at Goldsmiths, “The Saatchi Collection was an important influence, especially when they showed that really big Judd plywood piece as some of the artists...were definitely playing with things that looked like

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<sup>53</sup> Thompson, “The Economic of Culture: The Revival of British Art in the 80s,” 210.

<sup>54</sup> Gary Hume on his door paintings, quoted in Caroline Collier and Lesley McRae, eds., *The British Art Show 1990: A South Bank Centre Exhibition* (London: South Bank Centre, 1990), 66. The yBa style was inflected by Neo-Geo’s reading of 60s Minimalism. Art historian Hal Foster has argued that the Neo-Geo painting and sculpture deployed modernist abstraction in order “to play upon its failure.” Hal Foster, *The Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1996), 101. Thematizing formal abstraction’s absorption into the logic of capitalism, Neo-Geo artists used Minimalism’s language of reduction to empty expressivity from the work of art. Openly acknowledging their complicity with the logic undergirding capital, Neo-Geo artists imbued their work with a general sense of resignation, a feeling that it was no longer possible to produce images that would not immediately be coopted and put into service of a spectacularized commodity culture.

<sup>55</sup> Thompson, “The Economic of Culture: The Revival of British Art in the 80s,” 210.

minimal art.”<sup>56</sup> However, the lessons Gillick learned from Minimalism seemed to differ from many of his Goldsmiths contemporaries. For Gillick, the yBas’ cynical approach overlooks the most attractive aspects of modernism—that is, those various attempts to use architecture and design to give people a better life. If for Damien Hirst, the Minimalist cube provided a neutral container into which he could plug his own statements on death, Gillick became much more interested in the ways in which Minimalism laid bare its relation to the surrounding environment.

Throughout school, Gillick maintained a much more earnest belief in Minimalism. In particular, American artist Donald Judd held special significance. At Goldsmiths, Gillick first encountered Judd’s work flipping through the pages of *ArtForum*:

When I was an art student, you had to write a long essay for the end of your three years at art school. All the good books had already been taken out of the library, generally, by people who had already had some form of education in terms of academic thinking. And you were generally left with reference material...and art magazines were good, they couldn’t be removed from the library, so you always knew that they were going to be there. I pretty much either read or flipped through every copy of *ArtForum* from 1962 to 1987...so, I became very very interested in Donald Judd, mainly from reproduction.<sup>57</sup>

For his final thesis project, Gillick examined Judd’s practice and considered “the continued use of modernist formal language under postmodern theoretical conditions.”<sup>58</sup> Returning to the subject in 2004, Gillick interprets Judd in unmistakably political terms:

There is too much focus on a few key statements that Judd made, that over determine the reception of the work in relation to other earlier art. His sense of breaking free from earlier models of hierarchy and narcissistic expression in art was a resolutely political and progressive gesture. You are not supposed to fixate on the structures in isolation or to over rationalise them within the late modernist tendency towards reduction. The work

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<sup>56</sup> Liam Gillick, *Technique Anglaise: Current Trends in British Art*, ed. Andrew Renton (London: Thames and Hudson, 1991), 20.

<sup>57</sup> Donald Judd, *Lecture, with Haim Steinbach, Moderated by Mark Godfrey*.

<sup>58</sup> Liam Gillick, “Donald Judd,” in *Proxemics: Selected Writings 1988-2006*, ed. Lionel Bovier (Dijon: Les Presses du reel, 2006), 63.

functions best when it is allowed to hover between its connection to its given location and the rest of the relative experience we bring to the room.<sup>59</sup>

For Gillick, Judd's principal achievement was to bring the art object into dialogue with its surrounding environment, opening the object to 'the relative experience we bring to the room'.



Figure 1.6. Liam Gillick, *Manitoba*, 1988, plywood.

Early Gillick works show the influence of Judd; for example, *Manitoba* (1988)—a plywood box relief with a geometric shape etched in its front—recalls Judd's early painted plywood sculptures and the later wall reliefs [Figure 1.6]. Acknowledging Minimalism's influence on his work, Gillick explains: "There seems to be an idea about trying to do something which is simple in a formal sense, and somehow connected with minimalism, yet the constituent elements of the work are not relying on geometry or certain distancing devices...It's like saying, 'Maybe things aren't so neutral, maybe they are actually quite loaded with references'."<sup>60</sup> But

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<sup>59</sup> Gillick, 64. This quote echoes Gillick's teacher Michael Craig-Martin's statements about the influence of Minimalism: "Minimalism is often misunderstood as negative, nihilist, empty. In fact, the apparent simplicity of Minimalist works focuses attention without distraction on the straight-forward reality of the object, the relation of the object to the space in which it is seen, the relation of the viewer to this experience. This is neither simple nor an art of exclusion. The implication of art based on ordinary experience, using ordinary materials and objects, and making explicit the role of the viewer seems to me to be clear"(Craig-Martin, "Reflections on the 1960s and Early '70s," 3).

<sup>60</sup> Gillick, *Technique Anglaise*, 19.

even as the artist attempts to summarize the achievements of Minimalism, he hints at how his own work has surpassed its limitations. If Minimalism's open-ended inexhaustibility could often be read as empty or apolitical, Gillick intervenes in the 'experience we bring to the room', by directing our attention to specific problems articulated elsewhere in the work. Formally, works like *Discussion Island Border Think Tank* (1997)—an open cube constructed from Plexiglas—recall the Plexiglas boxes constructed by Judd [Figure 1.7].<sup>61</sup> Constructed from panes of red Plexiglas, the rectangular sculpture is divided by a panel in its center, creating a perceptual game that makes the beholder more aware of his or her location in space. Gillick's cube makes the viewer into an active spectator restaging the unfolding phenomenological encounter precipitated by Minimalism. However, the sculpture also points viewers beyond the space of the room, its title alluding to the possibility of discussion that might be enabled by a think tank. This discursive component of the work points viewers to a projected literary space, elaborated in the pages of Gillick's novel *Discussion Island*.

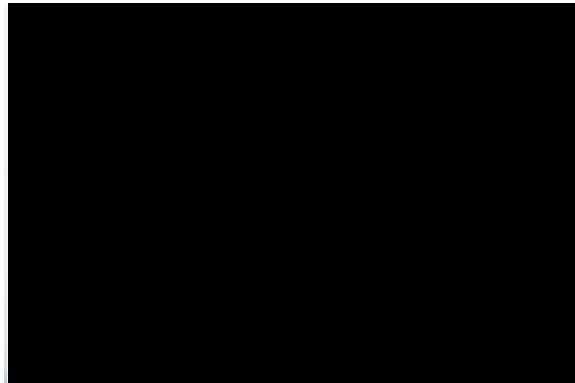


Figure 1.7. Liam Gillick, *Discussion Island Border Think Tank*, 1997, anodised aluminum, Plexiglas.

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<sup>61</sup> While Judd's works channel the look of mass-produced industrial objects, his sculptures were carefully fabricated to his specifications by highly skilled craftsmen. In contrast, Gillick deliberately implicates industrial manufacturing by selecting materials that happen to be available at the factory at the time of production. For more on Judd's fabrication and the controversy surrounding fraudulent reproductions, see Christine Mehring, "Getting Real: Christine Mehring on the Panza Collection Initiative," *Artforum* 60, no. 1 (September 2021): 220–27.



Figure 1.8. Liam Gillick, *84 Diagrams*, 1989, 4 boxes of printed paper.

As a young artist struggling with the sense of resignation and failure on the left, Gillick turned to architecture as means to move forward. After graduating from art school in the late eighties, Gillick began using an Apple computer to design hundreds of architectural drawings a day. For his first solo exhibition held at Karsten Schubert Gallery in London in 1989, Gillick printed hundreds of these drawings onto colored A4 sheets of paper that were passed around during the show's opening reception [Figure 1.8]. The large volume of production Gillick performed during this period was meant to distinguish his labor from the utilitarian demands of architectural work, "The fact that I might produce 200 designs in a day marked out my desire to propose buildings as different from that of an architect with a specific reason to draw them in small numbers and for particular places."<sup>62</sup> Due, in part, to the technical limitations of the computer program, the buildings are restricted to a vocabulary of rectilinear forms. As Michael Archer has described, "At first glance the designs appear coherent and familiar. They fit comfortably with the image of a kind of international modernism that one associates with Le

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<sup>62</sup> Liam Gillick, *Liam Gillick*, ed. Susanne Gaensheimer and Nicolaus Schafhausen (New York: Lukas & Sternberg, 2000), 205.

Corbusier, Mies van der Rohe and with the general principles of Constructivism and De Stijl.”<sup>63</sup>

If Gillick’s designs appear familiar, they are also provisional and incomplete—walls don’t quite line up with roofs and staircases lead to nowhere. Drawing upon the historical lexicon of modernist architecture, the open-ended structures suggest that the project of modernism is not yet completed.

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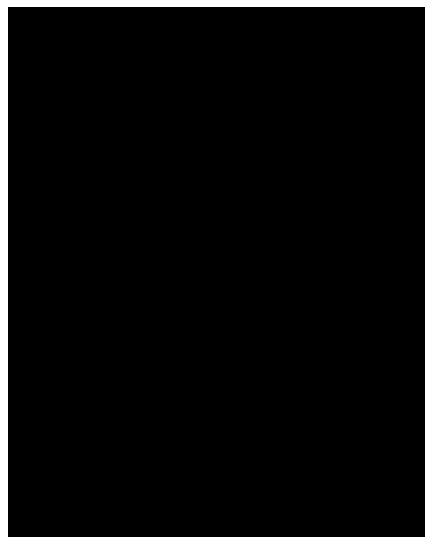


Figure 1.9. Liam Gillick, *Applied Complex Screen*, 1999, anodised aluminium, Plexiglas, Hayward Gallery, London.

*Applied Complex Screen* (1999) consists of a large aluminum grid installed in front of a large glass window [Figure 1.9]. Filled with red, blue, yellow, and orange panels of transparent Plexiglas, the screen casts colored light into the space behind the window, giving the architecture a vibrant dynamism. However, this flickering is arrested by the strict geometry of the screen’s aluminum grid, which follows the rigid geometry of the picture window’s concrete frame. Indeed, Gillick’s modular geometry recalls the standardized production schemes of the Fordist

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<sup>63</sup> Michael Archer, “Parallel Structures,” in *Liam Gillick*, ed. Susanne Gaensheimer and Nicolaus Schafhausen (New York: Lukas & Sternberg, 2000), 131.

assembly line—an association reinforced by the artist’s choice to source his Plexiglas from offcuts available at local factories. Beyond its reference to production processes, *Applied Complex Screen* channels the look of planning—harkening to a postwar modernism premised on efficiency, functionalism, and formal order.<sup>64</sup> Standing at over six feet tall, and stretching to nearly twelve feet across, the large screen mirrors the architectural scale of its site. The screen’s gridded aluminum frame recalls the exposed steel mullions of modern skyscrapers and the transparent Plexiglas panels evoke mid-century curtain wall façades. Gillick’s interest in modernism has much more to do with its various applications in the built environment than any claim for an autonomous art object. Indeed, Gillick cautions against “leaving the work as a merely formalist game based on architectural references where people are invited to work out what the pretty colours might mean.”<sup>65</sup> The work goes beyond simple formal resemblances, Gillick explains, “It is about planning, compromise, negotiation and how the near future is thought out in a post-utopian context. It obviously looks somewhat architectural, so we don’t need to keep stating this.”<sup>66</sup> While Gillick’s sculpture is certainly architectural, its reference to modern architecture is meant to evoke the atmosphere of planning—a nexus where Fordist production techniques, social democratic welfare provisions, and modernist design meet. Gillick writes:

The project of the prewar Bauhaus and other European forms of modernism restarted in [the] immediate postwar period...Europe had to be reimagined, and the connection

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<sup>64</sup> On close relationship between Fordism and modernist architecture David Harvey has observed, “[Fordism] built upon and contributed to the aesthetic of modernism—particularly the latter’s penchant for functionality and efficiency—in very explicit ways” (Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*, 136). See also David Gartman, *From Autos to Architecture: Fordism and Architectural Aesthetics in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2009).

<sup>65</sup> Liam Gillick, “Email from Liam Gillick to Anthony Spira,” March 9, 2002, Uncatalogued material, Whitechapel Gallery Archive.

<sup>66</sup> Gillick.

between modernist architecture and planning was crucial to this process, with planning moving into a primary position...The object was no longer operating in isolation. The application of modernism was once more connected to planning as much as to the attempt to produce an autonomous object. This was the dynamic time for the development of social models intended to give people a better life. Architecture was seen as a way to achieve this.<sup>67</sup>

As I discuss in further detail below, planning encompassed a distinctive orientation toward the future—one in which the future could be brought under rationalized control. However, amid the rote rationalization of planning, were attempts to give people a better life, to humanize the built environment, and protect people from the vagaries of the capitalist free market.

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Most broadly, planning describes a number of twentieth-century economic, social, and aesthetic techniques based on the principle of rationalized production.<sup>68</sup> The era of planning coincides with the introduction of Fordism—a system for producing long runs of standardized goods using mechanization, specialized tasks, and automation.<sup>69</sup> Named for the automobile

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<sup>67</sup> Liam Gillick, *Industry and Intelligence: Contemporary Art since 1820*, 2016, 41–42.

<sup>68</sup> On the origins of planning, see Antonio Negri, “Keynes and the Capitalist Theory of the State Post-1929,” in *Revolution Retrieved: Writings on Marx, Keynes, Capitalist Crisis, and New Social Subjects (1967-83)* (London: Red Notes, 1988), 5–41.

<sup>69</sup> In 1914, automobile manufacturer Henry Ford introduced the five-dollar, eight-hour day for workers operating the assembly line in his Dearborn, Michigan factory. By maximizing productivity Ford could offer workers a higher wage, insuring that For Ford’s plan to work, workers needed to be educated in morality and taste to ensure that they spent their income properly, David Harvey describes, “[Fordism was] meant to provide workers with sufficient income and leisure time to consume the mass-produced products the corporations were about to turn out in ever vaster quantities. But this presumed that workers knew how to spend their money properly. So in 1916, Ford sent an army of social workers into the homes of his ‘privileged’ (and largely immigrant) workers to ensure that the ‘new man’ of mass production had the right kind of moral probity, family life, and capacity for prudent (i.e. non-alcoholic) and ‘rational’ consumption to live up to corporate needs and expectations” (Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*, 126).

manufacturer, Fordism dates to 1914, when Henry Ford introduced the five-dollar, eight-hour day for workers operating the assembly line in his Dearborn, Michigan factory. Ford was heavily influenced by the work of Frederick W. Taylor, who popularized a form of “scientific management” designed to increase labor productivity by studying the body in motion and fragmenting the labor process into discrete tasks.<sup>70</sup> Ford built on Taylor’s idea to develop a semi-automatic assembly line, which streamlined production by separating workers into different stations to perform repetitive tasks. Ford’s major innovation was to unite the process of production and the mode of consumption. By maximizing productivity, Ford could offer a higher wage and shorter workday, ensuring that workers had sufficient income and leisure time to purchase the goods that they made. In his early remarks on Fordism, Antonio Gramsci observed that Fordism constituted “the biggest collective effort to date to create, with unprecedented speed, and with a consciousness of purpose unmatched in history, a new type of worker and a new type of man.”<sup>71</sup> Fordism represented a new cultural system in which the values of efficiency, rationality, and atomization shaped new ways of seeing and inhabiting the world. Ford’s production process demanded a worker whose habits and tastes were suited to the monotony of the assembly line. Indeed, Ford closely monitored his workers outside of the factory, ensuring that they adhered to the proper morality, family life, and consumption patterns.

As David Harvey describes:

[Fordism was] meant to provide workers with sufficient income and leisure time to consume the mass-produced products the corporations were about to turn out in ever vaster quantities. But this presumed that workers knew how to spend their money properly. So in 1916, Ford sent an army of social workers into the homes of his ‘privileged’ (and largely immigrant) workers to ensure that the ‘new man’ of mass production had the right kind of moral probity, family life, and capacity for prudent (i.e.

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<sup>70</sup> See Taylor, *The Principles of Scientific Management*.

<sup>71</sup> Gramsci, “Americanism and Fordism,” 290.

non-alcoholic) and ‘rational’ consumption to live up to corporate needs and expectations.<sup>72</sup>

Thus, Fordism extends beyond the narrow domain of the factory to describe a general way of life—one conditioned and trained to fit the rationalized ethos of mass production.

Organized according to Fordist labor practices, planning extends the principles of specialization, compartmentalization, and mechanization to all areas of life. Thus, planning also encompasses the governmental structures devised to buttress Fordism, including state welfare provisions designed to curb inequality and other destructive societal effects of the market. In response to the economic shock of 1929, John Maynard Keynes devised his political manifesto *The General Theory of Employment, Interest, and Money*, which argued that state intervention was necessary to secure capitalism’s virtuous cycle of supply and demand.<sup>73</sup> As Antonio Negri has argued, Keynesian state planning was designed to “remove the fear of the future,” to bring the future under rational control:

The state has to defend the present from the future. And if the only way to do this is to project the future from within the present, to plan the future according to present expectations, then the state must extend its intervention to take up the role of planner, and the economic thus becomes incorporated in the juridical. In its intervention, the state will act according to a series of norms; it will dictate what is to be. It will not guarantee the certainty of future events, but it will guarantee the certainty of the convention; it will seek the certainty of the present projected into the future.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*, 126.

<sup>73</sup> John Maynard Keynes, *General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money* (London: Macmillan, 1936).

<sup>74</sup> Negri, “Keynes and the Capitalist Theory of the State Post-1929,” 24.

In Britain, the core principles of the welfare state were outlined in the 1942 Beveridge plan, which enumerated the state's commitment to universal social security, child benefits, the establishment of the National Health Service, free secondary education, and full employment. Under the regime of planning, the state took a more active role in city planning efforts, viewing the built environment as an extension of its social democratic welfare policy. Britain's mass housing effort drove the development of state-managed council estates—the looming, modernist, concrete “tower blocks” constructed throughout the U.K. became visible emblems of the welfare state.

In architecture, the principles of state planning translated to a formal order premised on functionalism. By the 1930s, Henry-Russell Hitchcock and Philip Johnson had singled out functionalism as the defining feature of the emerging International Style, “the architect who builds in the international style seeks to display the true character of his construction and to express clearly his provision for function.”<sup>75</sup> Likewise, in their guidelines for “The Functionalist City,” CIAM separated the urban environment into four basic components: “inhabiting [dwelling], work, transportation, and recreation,”<sup>76</sup> each organized to “[lend] themselves naturally to standardization, industrialization, Taylorization (mass production).”<sup>77</sup> The factory and the machine proved powerful ciphers for emerging discourse on modernist architecture, so much so that Le Corbusier would triumphantly declare his *Unité d'Habitation* residential

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<sup>75</sup> Henry-Russell Hitchcock and Philip Johnson, *The International Style* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1997), 59.

<sup>76</sup> Le Corbusier, *The Athens Charter*, ed. Jean Giraudoux, trans. Anthony Eardley (New York: Grossman Publishers, 1973), 95.

<sup>77</sup> Le Corbusier, “Analysis of the Fundamental Elements of the Problem of the Minimum House,” in *The Radiant City* (New York: Orion Press, 1964), 178.

projects “machines for living in.”<sup>78</sup> And, Walter Gropius argued that modern architecture functioned as “a direct affirmation of our contemporary world of mechanization and rapid transit.”<sup>79</sup>

Critiques of modernist planning, like Jane Jacobs’s *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, lamented that cities had become “marvels of dullness and regimentation”<sup>80</sup> and “monotonous unnourishing gruel.”<sup>81</sup> Overtime, the enthusiasm for tower blocks waned. As Gillick notes, “The post-war devastation of Europe gave social planning a new lease of life. In Britain it was a short life; the first modernist public housing tower blocks were already being demolished in the late 1960s and early 1970s.”<sup>82</sup> As mass housing projects were given visual form through bleak black-and-white reproductions of council flats in the pages of architectural journals, the aesthetics of modernist architecture became scapegoat for the failures of public housing. While the tower blocks were designed to “fit” the needs of users, they also became a sign of rote standardization—a popular criticism argued that individuals were required to “fit” themselves into the estates, rather than the other way round.<sup>83</sup> Ultimately, the projects of mass housing and modern architecture had become so tightly yoked that architectural historian Charles Jencks would coincide the death of modernism with the demolition of one iconic housing project [Figure 1.10], triumphantly declaring, “Modern Architecture died in St. Louis, Missouri on July

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<sup>78</sup> Le Corbusier, “Mass Production Housing,” in *Toward an architecture*, ed. John Goodman (London: Frances Lincoln, 2008), 266.

<sup>79</sup> Walter Gropius, *The New Architecture and the Bauhaus* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1965), 19; 82.

<sup>80</sup> Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York: Vintage Books, 2016), 4.

<sup>81</sup> Jacobs, 7.

<sup>82</sup> Gillick, “Prevision: Should the Future Help the Past?,” 200.

<sup>83</sup> See Miles Glendinning and Stefan Muthesius, *Tower Block: Modern Public Housing in England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 307–18.

15, 1972 at 3:32 pm (or thereabouts) when the infamous Pruitt-Igoe scheme, or rather several of its slab blocks, were given the final coup de grace by dynamite.”<sup>84</sup>



Figure 1.10. Pruitt Igoe, St. Louis, Missouri, designed by Minoru Yamasaki, built 1954-56, demolished 1974.

From today, it easy to see Gillick’s aesthetic as an ironic emulation of the oppressive, rationalized scheme of the machine, but Gillick’s screen also evokes attempts to humanize the built environment. In Britain, criticisms of a strictly functionalist International Style architecture were worked out in the pages of the London-based *Architectural Review*. In a 1947 editorial meant to establish the journal’s aims for the second-half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the editors decried architects willing to “rely on geometry unadorned and the natural characteristics of materials.”<sup>85</sup> The rational functionalism of the modernist ‘revolution’, they argued, was merely a necessary step on the way to a humanized aesthetic, “Architecture has had for the time being deliberately to dehumanize itself, but the success of the Revolution and the subsequent consolidating period of functionalism means that it can now seek more direct contact with human aspirations.”<sup>86</sup> Against the cold, anonymity of functionalist design, architecture would need to “becom[e] once more a

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<sup>84</sup> Charles Jencks, “The Death of Modern Architecture,” in *New Paradigm in Architecture: The Language of Post-Modernism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 9.

<sup>85</sup> “The Second Half Century,” *Architectural Review*, January 1947, 30.

<sup>86</sup> “The Second Half Century,” 36.

vehicle for humanity's dramatization of itself" and "find a way of humanizing itself as regards expression."<sup>87</sup>



Figure 1.11. Golden Lane Estate, City of London, designed by Chamberlin, Powell, and Bon, built 1952.

In planning efforts, the Modern Architectural Research (MARS) group, the British faction of CIAM, emphasized the social imperative of the welfare state, translating the modernist preference for minimal materials, clean lines, and openness into the social orthodoxy of affordability, hygiene, and security.<sup>88</sup> According to Arthur Korn, chief architect of the MARS Plan for London, "the American grid-iron, rational city" was nothing short of "deadly."<sup>89</sup> Modernist architecture could only be redeemed, he argued, by joining "knife-sharp analytical construction" with "Utopia born in the realm of the Unconscious."<sup>90</sup> Ironically, in their quest for a humanized aesthetic, British architects turned to the attractive vibrancy of American product

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<sup>87</sup> "The Second Half Century," 36.

<sup>88</sup> For a detailed history of the tower block's modernist origins, see Glendinning and Muthesius, *Tower Block*. In particular, the authors argue that the health movement motivated interest in modern design and "manifested itself in the demand for cleanliness and orderliness" (Glendinning and Muthesius, 11).

<sup>89</sup> Arthur Korn, Maxwell Fry, and Dennis Sharp, "The M.A.R.S. Plan for London," *Perspecta* 13/14 (1971): 164.

<sup>90</sup> Korn, Fry, and Sharp, 164.

design. Projects like the Golden Lane Estates in London (built 1952-1962) [Figure 1.11] incorporated brightly colored Vitrolite panels into the building façades to add levity to the harsh concrete and steel construction.<sup>91</sup> The animated surface of Gillick’s screens recalls the primary colored scheme of these council estates, gesturing to the tower block’s machine aesthetic, but also pointing to the humanizing aspirations of the Keynesian welfare state.

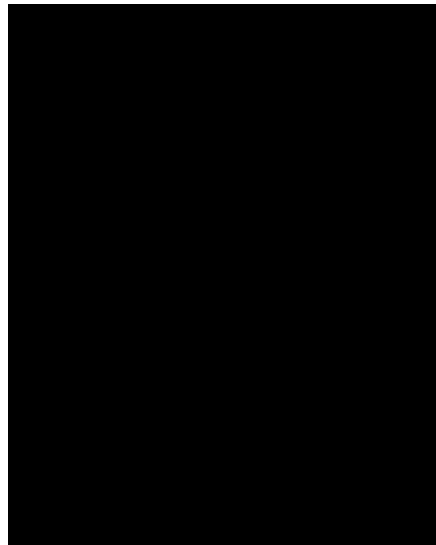


Figure 1.12. Liam Gillick, *Discussion Island Lobby Commission*, 2000, stainless steel, painted steel, wood, entryphone system, dimensions variable, located in various lobbies, Rue. G. Combaz, Brussels.

Gillick comes closest to realizing these aspirations with *Discussion Island Lobby Commission* (2000), a collaboration with the state-run Fondation Roi Baudouin in Belgium [Figure 1.12]. The foundation asked Gillick to create an artwork for the oldest public housing units in Brussels, located on rue Gisbert Combaz in Saint-Gilles. While the commissioning body

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<sup>91</sup> In America, Vitrolite was a material immediately associated with commercial storefronts. As part of the “Modernize Main Street” campaign, businesses across the country were given subsidies to update storefronts—the lightweight, colorful glass Vitrolite panels were a preferred material (see Gabrielle M. Esperdy, “Marketing Modernization,” in *Modernizing Main Street: Architecture and Consumer Culture in the New Deal* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008], 95–140).

had hoped Gillick would create an art object that could be hung in the buildings' lobbies, the artist used his funds to renovate the sites. For his renovation, Gillick replaced panes of glass in the entry door of each building with panels of translucent colored glass in ultramarine, orange, and yellow. At rue Gisbert Combaz 14, for example, high-keyed yellow panes of glass were set behind the original wrought iron grating. Above, three panels of yellow glass inserted into an otherwise austere grid of glass only heightened the stylistic clash between Gillick's minimalist geometry and the intricate organic design of the windows below. On the interior, Gillick painted the existing steel letterboxes in each lobby to match the color of the windows. While Gillick's formal changes amounted to, as the granting body described it, a "light-handed intervention," the artist used the project to address the residents' practical need for safety and communication.<sup>92</sup> Gillick developed a personalized call system for each lobby, with bells programed to play music specially created for each resident. If the housing project was founded on the premise of helping people live better, Gillick builds on this initial promise by making a practical improvement to the space, giving the residents a communication device they can use in their everyday lives. Here, Gillick's willful citation of the language of high modernism moves beyond an ironic take on its failures, attempting to recover something of the utopian aspirations of modernism's humanism.

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<sup>92</sup> The commissioning body notes that the buildings are listed as historical sites and emphasizes that Gillick's project provide only a "light-handed intervention" into the spaces, see "Discussion Island Lobby | Les Nouveaux Commanditaires," accessed August 23, 2017, <http://www.nouveauxcommanditaires.eu/en/25/103/discussion-island-lobby>.

However, Gillick argues, given the recent turn to flexibilized white-collar work in the sphere of management, we might turn to corporate spaces to uncover modernism's utopian imagination:

Most major utopian public housing projects were over by the end of the 1960s. These were really important and arguably flourished within a more constructive and progressive set of ideologies. But the Modern Project didn't stop with the collapse of Ronan Point and the fact that estates were badly maintained and managed; instead it continued in the corporate world. People who had been working on very interesting utopian housing projects shifted into the corporate sphere and did good modern work for corporate interests instead.<sup>93</sup>

In other words, modernism retreated from public housing projects to corporate business parks, from a future that failed, to one that still has not arrived. We find this transformation articulated most forcefully in the corporate space of management, where the logic of planning eventually gives way to speculation. Amidst these transformations in management, modernist planning's humanizing mission was eventually absorbed and distorted to provide the justification for the hyper-flexibilized and precarious situation in which we find ourselves today. Gillick's work traces this history by engaging with two distinct managerial paradigms: the first, bureaucratic planning, which works to eliminate risk and maintain security; the second, scenario planning, which develops flexible and adaptable models to prepare for precarious futures. As I discuss below, these forms show up in Gillick's work as a dense constellation of public works, corporate commissions, art installations, and speculative texts.

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<sup>93</sup> Liam Gillick and Anthony Spira, "Speculation and Planning," in *Liam Gillick: The Wood Way* (London: Whitechapel Art Gallery, 2002), 17.

## Chapter Two: Discussion Island: ‘The Potentially Neurotic, Anxiety-Provoking Situation within which We Find Cultural Producers Operating’

This chapter examines Liam Gillick’s ongoing *Discussion Island / Big Conference Centre*—a project that explores the relationship between planning and speculation within the built environment. The remarkably diverse work includes a novel, sculpture, design commissions, and architectural interventions. The artist describes the novel as “a story that sweeps across various locations and situations in order to create a complex picture of how decisions are made at a point where there is no strong shared consensus about how the future should be. Or, to put it another way, how decisions are made during a period when people have been told that no collective progressive set of ideas are possible, nor can such ideas ever find a stable form.”<sup>1</sup> The text revolves around the concept of “scenario projection”—a tool developed by think tank strategists to anticipate and manage the future. The book opens with an employee jumping to his death from the 22<sup>nd</sup> floor of the Big Conference Centre:

Up there, the day before yesterday, someone had finally done it. Lost in the place, caught and alone, they had repeatedly run full pelt against the reinforced glass of that best top room. Minor personal damage like bruising and broken teeth must have gone unnoticed in the repetitive drive for fresh air and dramatic absence. As far as anyone can make out he needed at least ten attempts. Moving faster and faster with each flailing run-up. Breathing hard and determined. And then on the eleventh impact, the glass gave way. Crashing open and falling away to allow brutal passage and moments of weightlessness on the way to physical chaos below.<sup>2</sup>

The suicide reveals a floor, deliberately overlooked by architects and planners, “Almost as if the people who designed The Big Conference Centre were looking for an opportunity to fuck up.”<sup>3</sup>

After discovering the space, a trio of strategists forms a ‘think tank about think tanks’ and work

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<sup>1</sup> Gillick, “Discussion Island,” 139.

<sup>2</sup> Gillick, 169.

<sup>3</sup> Gillick, 169.

to develop a ‘predictive’ report for how the overlooked floor might be utilized. The characters explain their research in bland, administrative language over nine chapters, each named for a different step in the scenario process.

The *Discussion Island* project began in 1995, when Gillick was invited to participate in the exhibition *This Is Today (Trailer)*, curated by Barbara Steiner. Evoking the concept of a movie trailer or preview, the exhibition’s title tested the relationship between the present and near future, suggesting that the show might serve as a teaser for an upcoming event happening elsewhere. This sense of displacement was heightened by the extremely short duration of the exhibition, which ran for a little over a week, from November 11-19 in Mediapark, Cologne. Taking advantage of the exhibition’s speculative structure, Gillick used the show to begin research for a future body of work. Titled *What if? Scenario (Part 1)*, the brief for the installation read as follows:

(Halogen lights (at least 500w each) enough to fill a chosen space with enough super bright light to be really noticeable. A list of various documents, some examples if possible but not essential).

A consideration of the what if scenario. Starting to think about new parallel histories that may be constructed from a set of specific documents. This is an exercise, the establishment of a specific super-bright environment in which to consider the possibility of learning from another’s errors. Once the particular space has been decided upon, a number of halogen lights should be installed, up to the point where any reasonable person would comment upon the fact that the space was extremely brightly lit. Then a list of the appropriate documents, and even some examples of the documents should be left in this place. A sight for consideration, a place to start again. A moment to ponder upon the what might have.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Liam Gillick, “The What If? Scenario Part 1,” 1995, <http://www.liamgillick.info/home/work/mcnamara-erasmus-whatif/the-what-if-scenarios>.

Brightly lit with halogen lamps, the gallery space took on the appearance of a theater stage, conflating the scenario's political and theatrical resonances [Figure 2.1].<sup>5</sup> Gillick provided Steiner, the exhibition curator, with a list of instructions, which called for a number of documents to be gathered in the space. The artist's suggestions included a mixture of Cold War think tank conspiracy literature and popular press—old copies of *Newsweek* magazine, the *Journal of American History*, the public papers of the Presidents of the United States, and *The Pentagon Papers*. The documents requested by Gillick, some still classified, would have been nearly impossible for Steiner to assemble completely at the time.<sup>6</sup> Ultimately, with Gillick's permission, the curator elected to only display the list of documents, rather than produce the actual materials. Thus, the exhibition engaged in yet another level of speculative thinking, requiring viewers to imagine the documents that might fill the space. Mimicking the projective research methods of think tanks, the installation was conceived as the first stage in developing Gillick's book *Discussion Island / Big Conference Centre*.

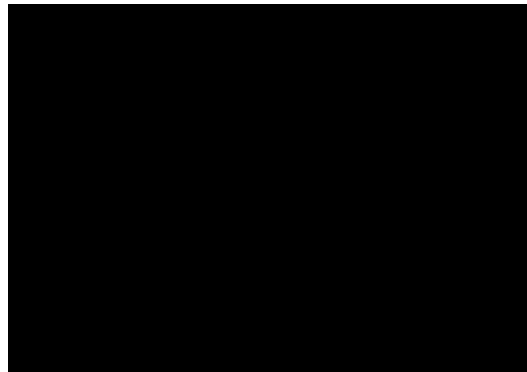


Figure 2.1. Liam Gillick, *What If? Scenario (Part 1)*, 1995, installation view of 2014 recreation.

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<sup>5</sup> Purportedly, the creator of scenario planning—RAND Corporation strategist Herman Kahn—adopted the term scenario from Hollywood terminology “because he liked the emphasis it gave, not so much on forecasting, but on creating a story or myth.” (Gill Ringland, *Scenario Planning: Managing for the Future* [New York: Wiley, 1998], 12).

<sup>6</sup> In a remake of the work at Le Magasin in 2014, a computer connected to the web took the place of the documents, highlighting the ways that the internet has fundamentally changed our relationship to information.

Following from the premise of the *What If? Scenario*, Gillick's novel explores tactics for studying the near future. The trauma that starts the novel creates an opening for access to the near future; immediately after the suicide, "Everything is different. There is access to tomorrow."<sup>7</sup> The novel embarks on a number of temporal shifts, never giving readers a clear timeline for the events that take place. "At least five years pass,"<sup>8</sup> appearing a few pages later, the two-word sentence, "Five years."<sup>9</sup> Later, we are told that we are "back five years ago."<sup>10</sup> At points, Gillick even experiments with what it might be like to actually write from the future, an email message begins, "To whom it may concern. The date of this message is tomorrow."<sup>11</sup> Constantly shifting temporal settings make it difficult to place the events that occur in *Discussion Island* into a stable sequencing, instead, the text presents an open temporality that continually directs readers to thinking about the future. Like the "What If?" scenario, Gillick's concept of a projected future is drawn from the economic principle of speculation, the characters in the novel explain:

When you get a domination of projection you also get the possibility of capitalism, because you can decide, well, maybe next week I would like to be in this position, I'm currently selling ten pairs of socks a week but I would like to project that in a week's time I'll be selling twenty pairs of socks... So this question of projection is central, linked to an attempt to become as flexible as the most dynamic systems in the society... We still use the idea of projection on a day-to-day basis as the replacement for far-reaching utopias.<sup>12</sup>

When describing the fictional space in *Discussion Island*, the characters identify projection as key characteristic of the design:

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<sup>7</sup> Gillick, "Discussion Island," 141.

<sup>8</sup> Gillick, 158.

<sup>9</sup> Gillick, 162.

<sup>10</sup> Gillick, 163.

<sup>11</sup> Gillick, 189.

<sup>12</sup> Gillick, 196.

We had to think hard about the look of our offices. So we kept what we had already got and installed overhead platforms and related screens that could project a space, where it might be possible to consider key issues before too much research had taken place. The building really works alongside the research. It is not emptied out because no one is expected to fill up some notional void with complex presentation, instead it might be possible for our office to act as a backdrop within which a series of scenarios may be played out.<sup>13</sup>

In the novel, platforms emerge as a means of providing a physical architectural space for the characters to interact with each other: the characters encounter a “projecting platform under which an exchange takes place,”<sup>14</sup> or “sit under a platform and argue.”<sup>15</sup> Likewise, when a discussion is taking place between a group of people at a bar Gillick notes, “There is a silvered canopy above their heads. Parts of this provisional platform are filled and brightly coloured.”<sup>16</sup> In related gallery installations, Gillick creates “discussion islands”—Plexiglas screens and platforms that project light, delimiting potential zones for conversation. Generally, the platforms and screens are rectilinear in shape and constructed from an aluminum frame, subdivided into a grid. Gillick fills the grids with panels fabricated in various materials, usually Plexiglas, but also materials like plywood and Formica. While the sculptures are not site specific, they engage with their architectural setting, often acting as temporary pavilions or impromptu wall dividers. For example, the 1996 sculpture (*The What If? Scenario*) *Discussion Platform (London)* [Figure 2.2] comprises an aluminum grid positioned parallel to the floor in the corner of the gallery, supported by a chromed brass pole. In his notes accompanying the platform, Gillick explains, “The work projects a site for discussion...Coloured Plexiglas partially fills the framework at the top of the platform. It allows different coloured shadows to be cast over the people standing

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<sup>13</sup> Gillick, 160.

<sup>14</sup> Gillick, 157.

<sup>15</sup> Gillick, 158.

<sup>16</sup> Gillick, 184.

below it...”<sup>17</sup> Translucent rectangular sheets of primary-colored Plexiglas partially fill the suspended platform, casting an array of colored light on the gallery wall, expanding the area taken up by the canopy. The specifications for the work require that it be installed high enough to stand under, inviting spectators to use the space as a quasi-architectural shelter. In doing so, the platform projects a provisional space where a number of scenarios, never explicitly described, might take place.



Figure 2.2. Liam Gillick, *(The What if? Scenario) Discussion Platform (London)*, 1996, aluminum, Plexiglas, and chromed brass fittings.

Today, any artist wishing to intervene in the apparatuses for controlling the future needs to reckon with the scenario model. Adaptable, anticipatory, and risky, scenario projection is the prototypical format for the flexible and dynamic situation of neoliberalism.<sup>18</sup> *Discussion Island*

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<sup>17</sup> Gillick, *Liam Gillick*, 49.

<sup>18</sup> Philip Mirowski's book *Machine Dreams* provides an excellent history of how cybernetics influenced Cold War strategic analysts and neoliberal economic theorists, see Philip Mirowski, *Machine Dreams: Economics Becomes a Cyborg Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002). On the relationship between systems analysis and neoliberal rational choice theory see S. M Amadae, *Rationalizing Capitalist Democracy: The Cold War Origins of Rational Choice Liberalism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003). Developed in the postwar era to study “not things, but ways of behaving,” cybernetics describes “the entire field of control and communication theory, whether in the machine or the animal.” (W. Ross Ashby, *An Introduction to Cybernetics* [London: Chapman and Hall, 1957], 1; Norbert Wiener, *Cybernetics, or Control and Communication in the Animal or Machine* [Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press, 1985], 11).

projects a number of related scenarios—a novel about a fictional group of think tank strategists, installations that assemble together a series of decorative props and half-statements related to the novel, a practical design for a public housing project, a discursive essay on the battle between speculation and planning, or a propped up platform that projects a site for contemplation. Every repetition of *Discussion Island*, through textual responses or the production of objects, constitutes a continued dialogue with the work as a whole. As users are confronted with more and more information, they must operate like strategic analysts, better able to imagine and manage the future differently.

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*The workplace became more and more a site for the expression of applied modernism. Late-modernist abstraction was a symbol of pseudoautonomy. The shift from idealized utopian pavilions toward the corporate pavilion had already taken place...Architecture seemed indifferent to the dilemma of the corporate versus the applied utopian and mined both. This indifference created new potentials and tensions for the artist and more damaged space within which to operate.*<sup>19</sup>

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Cybernetics involves the study of various systems of exchange, ranging from biological mechanisms, to social organization, and economic markets. As a theory of communication and exchange, cybernetics was central to the decision-making tactics devised by the RAND Corporation, which used war games, computational mechanisms, and strategic scenarios to study complex interactive systems. Neoliberal theorist Friedrich Hayek described economic markets in explicitly cybernetic terms: “the price and market system is...a system of communication, which passes on (in the form of prices, determined only on the competitive market) the available information that each individual needs to act, and to act rationally.” (Friedrich A. von Hayek, “The Sensory Order after 25 Years,” in *The Sensory Order and Other Writings on the Foundations of Theoretical Psychology* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017], 382). The cybernetic concept of feedback, that is, the notion that systems will self-organize in response to stimuli, proved influential for neoliberalism’s conception of self-regulating economic markets. As neoliberalism construes individual choices in terms of the market, human behavior is rendered as a reflexive response to economic stimuli.

<sup>19</sup> Gillick, *Industry and Intelligence*, 64.

Gillick's work occupies the 'damaged space' between the utopian spirit of modernist planning and the bureaucratic ethos of corporate management. Gillick's fictions frequently weigh in on managerial man, following a cast of characters that includes Kennedy's Secretary of Defense, Robert McNamara, RAND Corporation analyst Herman Kahn, and various Cold War defense intellectuals.<sup>20</sup> The novel *Discussion Island* includes meticulous descriptions of interior office spaces, using bland bureaucratic language that equals the staid décor. Throughout the text, very precise descriptions of the overlooked twenty-second floor emerge. The space, we are told, has "Windows down to the floor. Clad in silencing carpet."<sup>21</sup> These windows are fitted with "Seven-Up coloured curtains"<sup>22</sup> And, among its offices, there's "a room with Coca-Cola coloured walls... Not the whole wall, but certainly the top three quarters of each, not including the area around the windows, or the last small strip before the ceiling is reached."<sup>23</sup> Passages of the text are devoted to describing even a single piece of furniture, for example, a chair made of "orange leather bound together by a tubed steel framework. The orange is soft yet stays within roughly squared-off dimensions due to the way it's sewn and stuffed. The frame tubing is chromed to high brightness and cuts slightly into the padded leather. Clearly designed well before this point the seats are locked and caught within the logic of an always-new look."<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Kahn served as the inspiration for Stanley Kubrick's film *Dr. Strangelove*, which parodied the Cold War dramas that attempted to recuperate managerial man. In Kubrick's film, the wheelchair-bound scientific advisor, and former Nazi, Dr. Strangelove, despite all his organization schemes and planning, is unable to forestall total nuclear destruction. In a last ditch effort at heroic masculinity, air force commander Major Kong straddles the phallic nuclear bomb, riding it like a cowboy towards imminent doom.

<sup>21</sup> Gillick, "Discussion Island," 141.

<sup>22</sup> Gillick, 161.

<sup>23</sup> Gillick, 141–42.

<sup>24</sup> Gillick, 149–50.

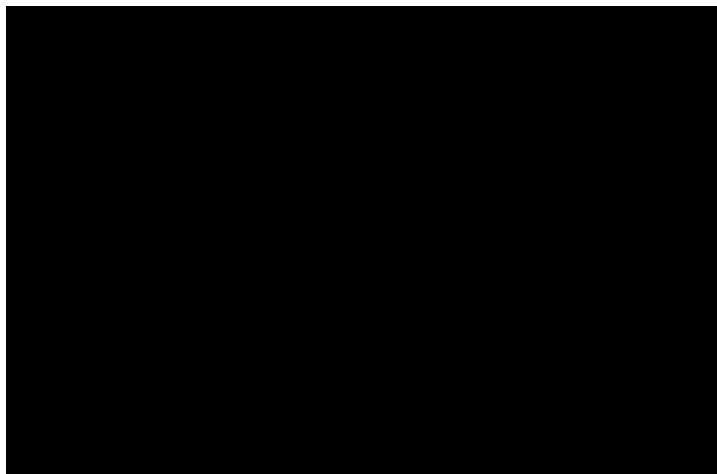


Figure 2.3. Liam Gillick, *Big Conference Centre Legislation Screen; Big Conference Centre Relational Tool*, 1998, installation view, Air de Paris.

Occasionally, Gillick's installations give form to these precise descriptions. For his 1998 show, *Up on the Twenty-Second Floor*, Gillick extended the installation into the offices of the Air de Paris gallery. Upon entering the gallery space, viewers could be forgiven for being slightly confused about what, exactly, was on display. The relatively spare gallery contained only two works, the large and imposing *Big Conference Centre Legislation Screen* and *Big Conference Centre Relational Tool* [Figure 2.3]. The latter work, a wall of pine planking inset with halogen lamps was installed flush with the gallery wall, giving the sense that it might be a built-in fixture of the original architecture, or, perhaps, an experimental lighting rig. After passing the large screen barrier that stretched nearly from wall-to-wall, viewers abruptly encountered the gallery's open office spaces, an awkward cluster of computer desks and bookshelves pushed into one corner. Hanging from the ceiling above, *Big Conference Centre Middle Management Platform*, an aluminum platform filled with translucent panels of red, yellow, and blue replicated the primary color scheme of the standing screen, linking the exhibition space to the offices [Figure 2.4]. Below the platform, dozens of short, hasty brushstrokes of brown paint covered the wall, complete with paint drips and areas of dry

scumbled strokes. Slightly varying in tone, the strokes resembled a strange hybrid of gestural mark making and paint swatch sampling. Referring viewers back to the novel, Gillick has described the work, titled *Inside Now, We Walked Into a Room with Coca-Cola Coloured Walls*, as “an attempt to match the colour of Coca-Cola, leaving test marks on the wall. The act reflects a reference to a passage in the book *Discussion Island: Big Conference Centre* where one location has walls the colour of Coca-Cola.”<sup>25</sup> Above the office desks, Gillick installed *A Search for the Centre Ground Kept in Check by Violence, Disorder and Conspiracy*, a large circular bronze-tinted mirror with a small portion of the top sliced off. Suggesting that the office might serve as another possible location for the events described in the novel, Gillick describes the work as “A large mirror that is deployed in search of the three main characters from the book *Discussion Island: Big Conference Centre*.”<sup>26</sup>

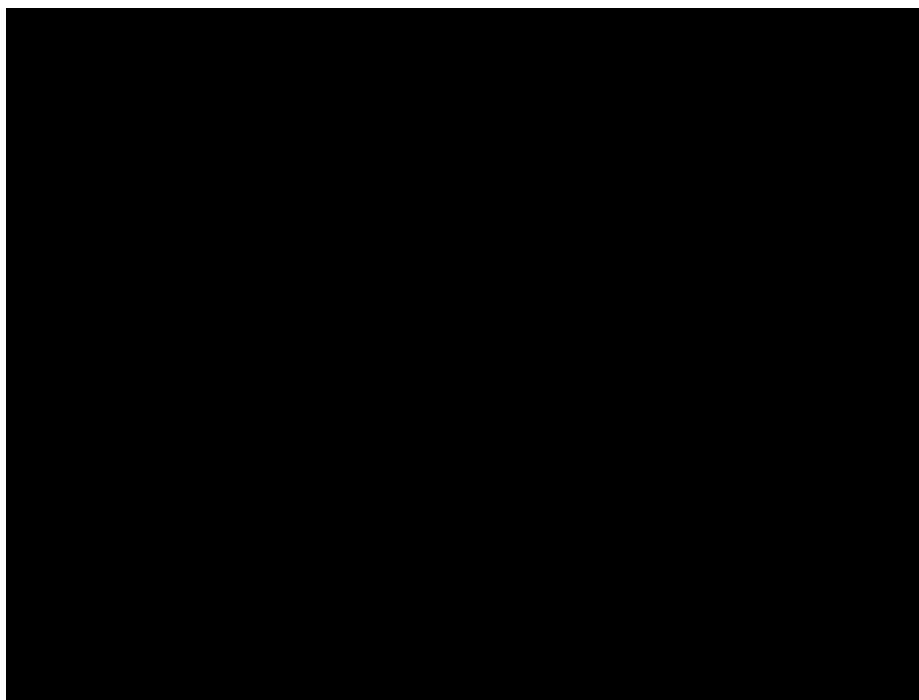


Figure 2.4. Liam Gillick, *Up on the Twenty-Second Floor*, 1998, installation view, Air de Paris.

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<sup>25</sup> Gillick, *Liam Gillick*, 80.

<sup>26</sup> Gillick, 80.

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By the mid-twentieth century, the managerial personality had become a major subject of sociological inquiry. As early as the 1940s, sociologist James Burnham identified a drastic shift in the nature of work in capitalist societies, which he dubbed the “managerial revolution.”<sup>27</sup>

During World War II, intensified mass production schemes were required to support the war effort and managers emerged as a class with distinctive skills for organizing increasingly complex production schemes. In his 1951 study *White Collar*, C. Wright Mills argued that a new personality type had emerged amid the rise of managerial work, “As the means of administration are enlarged and centralized, there are more managers in every sphere of modern society, and the managerial type of man becomes more important in the total social structure.”<sup>28</sup> Mills’

managerial man identifies completely with the rationalized scheme of his enterprise:

They follow clearly defined lines of authority, each of which is related to other lines, and all related to the understood purposes of the enterprise as a going concern. Their activities and feelings are within delimited spheres of action, set by the obligations and requirements of their own ‘expertise’. Their power is neatly seated in the office they occupy and derived only from that office; all their relations within the enterprise are thus impersonal and set by the formal hierarchical structure. Their expectations are on a thoroughly calculable basis, and are enforced by the going rules and explicit sanctions; their appointment is by examination, or, at least, on the basis of trained-for competencies; and they are vocationally secure, with expected life tenure, and a regularized promotion scheme.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Written in the wake of the Great Depression, Burnham saw the growing role of the state under the New Deal as a sign of an increasing trend towards state intervention. While Burnham’s prediction that the state would eventually take complete control of the means of production turned out to be wrong, his descriptions of an emergent managerial class were prescient and also helped identify a group that would become a central preoccupation of subsequent sociological accounts. See Burnham, *The Managerial Revolution; What Is Happening in the World*.

<sup>28</sup> Mills, *White Collar: The American Middle Classes*, 77.

<sup>29</sup> Mills, 92.

As Mills explained, the effects of this rationalized hierarchy were particularly painful for those in middle management who “had their authority stripped from them.”<sup>30</sup> Neither imbued with the authority of top-level executive nor in direct control of the means of production, “The middle managers do not count for very much in the larger world beyond their individual bureaucracies... As with any ‘middle’ group, what happens to the middle managers is largely dependent upon what happens to those above and below them—to top executives and to foremen.”<sup>31</sup>

Likewise, sociologist William H. Whyte dubbed this new managerial figure the “organization man”—the cultural emblem of staid conformity and corporate bureaucracy. According to Whyte, the organization man is faithful to three key tenets: scientism—the organization man believes in “the promise that with the same techniques that have worked in the physical sciences we can eventually create an exact science of man;”<sup>32</sup> belongingness—he desires the “deep emotional security that comes from total integration with the group;”<sup>33</sup> and togetherness—the organization man is defined by “his growing preoccupation with group work.”<sup>34</sup> The ideal space for the organization man was the suburbs, which Whyte deemed dormitories for the organization man.<sup>35</sup> The suburbs, Whyte explained, were “communities made in [the organization man’s] image.”<sup>36</sup> Advertisements for the suburban communities that popped

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<sup>30</sup> Mills, 86.

<sup>31</sup> Mills, 87.

<sup>32</sup> Whyte, *The Organization Man*, 23.

<sup>33</sup> Whyte, 32.

<sup>34</sup> Whyte, 46.

<sup>35</sup> Whyte, 298. Postwar sociological accounts focused in particular on the American suburbs, inextricably linking the managerial mindset with suburbanness and Americanness. Thus, even as the managerial personality achieves global influence, the phenomenon tends to be viewed as a distinctly American export. As a British artist, Gillick’s work demonstrates the ways in which the American context continues to shape the British imaginary surrounding managerial life. American managerial figures like US Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara and RAND intellectual Herman Kahn populate Gillick’s narratives.

<sup>36</sup> Whyte, 267.

up throughout the US in the postwar period appealed to the mentality of the organization man. Whyte provides examples of ad campaigns Park Forest—a planned suburban community on the outskirts of Chicago—these ads appealed to the conformist ethos of the organization man with slogans like “You Belong”<sup>37</sup> and “You’re part of a big group.”<sup>38</sup> As Whyte elaborated, “It is the organization man, then, more than the worker whom he wishes to serve, who most urgently wants to belong... Where the immersion of the individual used to be cause for grumbling and a feeling of independence lost, the organization man of today is now welcoming it. He is not attempting to reverse the trend and to cut down the deference paid to the group; he is working to increase it.”<sup>39</sup>

The conditions of management, characterized by a loss of individuality and stultifying conformity quickly become intolerable, memorialized by the ‘tragic’ white-collar worker. David Riesman’s *The Lonely Crowd* captured the tragic element of middle-class American life, highlighting the more troublesome features of a newly “corporatized, bureaucratized, suburbanized and homogenized white-collar America.”<sup>40</sup> Riesman identified a new personality type—the “outer-directed” white-collar worker, a figure whose attitudes were steered by others rather than tradition or personal desire. The outer-directed personality was the hallmark of Riesman’s “lonely crowd”—a group who embodied an “enormous ideological shift favoring submission to the group,” and looked to “the peer group as the measure of all things.”<sup>41</sup> As Riesman described, this mentality was the result of transformations in the nature of work, as

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<sup>37</sup> Whyte, 284.

<sup>38</sup> Whyte, 284.

<sup>39</sup> Whyte, 46–47.

<sup>40</sup> Wilfred M. McClay, “Fifty Years of the Lonely Crowd,” *The Wilson Quarterly* (1976-) 22, no. 3 (1998): 34.

<sup>41</sup> Riesman, *The Lonely Crowd*, 82.

service-oriented, white-collar jobs required effective interpersonal relationships, individuals began to look to the desires of the group for cues on how to behave.<sup>42</sup>

Popular culture was likewise preoccupied with the tragic middle manager—whose attenuated authority and penchant for conformism provided the seeds for apocalyptic destruction.<sup>43</sup> These narratives focus on the conflict between conformity and individuality that animates the identity of the organization man. The general narrative went something like this:

A middle-management executive is in a spot of trouble. He finds that the small branch plant he's helping to run is very likely to blow up. There is a way to save it: if he presses a certain button the explosion will be averted. Unfortunately, however, just as he's about to press a button his boss heaves into view. The boss is a scoundrel and a fool, and at this moment he's so scared he is almost incoherent. Don't press the button, he says.

The middle-management man is no rebel and he knows that the boss, stupid as he is, represents The Organization. Still, he would like to save everyone's life. Thus his dilemma: if he presses the button he will not be acting like a good organization man and the plant will be saved. If he doesn't press it he will be a good organization man and they will all be blown to smithereens.<sup>44</sup>

The above moral dilemma, paraphrased by Whyte, comes from Herman Wouk's popular novel *The Caine Mutiny* (1951), which stages managerial man's submission to authority as the site of potentially cataclysmic oblivion. The doomsday formula appears frequently in postwar fiction, where the once powerless managerial man becomes the hero we need to save us from certain destruction.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>42</sup>The outer-directed man was "brought up to rely upon the cues of others, particularly peer groups, coworkers, and the mass media, in addition to parents, to find their way in the world." McClay, "Fifty Years of the Lonely Crowd," 37.

<sup>43</sup> For an in-depth analysis of responses to managerial life in postwar literature see Andrew Hoberek, *The Twilight of the Middle Class Post-World War II American Fiction and White-Collar Work*, Princeton Paperbacks (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

<sup>44</sup> Whyte, *The Organization Man*, 243.

<sup>45</sup> The genre of Cold War disaster films is massive; some notable examples include *The Day the Earth Caught Fire* (1961); *Fail Safe* (1964); and *The Bedford Incident* (1965). The genre was famously parodied by Stanley Kubrick's *Dr. Strangelove* (1964). More recent fictions have cast the disaster of managerial man in more banal terms, see for example David Foster Wallace's *The*

Other popular fictions focus on the tragedy of domestic life, wherein the inability of managerial man to connect emotionally with his family is somehow overcome. The novel-turned-film *The Man in the Grey Flannel Suit* (1956) follows Tom Rath, a wounded soldier trying to integrate back into civilian life. Tom's dilemma centers on how to balance the demands of corporate work and his desire for quality family time. When offered a high-paying position by his boss, Tom angrily rejects the authority of the organization:

I want the money. Nobody likes money better than I do. But I'm just not the kind of guy who can work evenings and week ends and all the rest of it forever...I'm not the kind of person who can get all wrapped up in a job—I can't get myself convinced that my work is the most important thing in the world. I've been through one war. Maybe another one's coming. If one is, I want to be able to look back and figure I spent the time between the wars with my family, the way it should have been spent.<sup>46</sup>

Tom turns down the job so that he can spend more time at home. Meanwhile, the family's financial woes are miraculously solved when Tom inherits his grandmother's estate, which can be parceled into suburban homesteads for yet even more gray flannel-suited men. The story promotes the individual family unit as the antidote to the alienation of organizational life.

Other postwar narratives see managerial man's attenuated masculinity restored to him—through the individuality afforded by an exaggerated and excessive consumption of goods, women, and leisure activities. The original U.K. trailer for the James Bond film *Dr. No* (1962), provides a comically dry verbal description of Bond's profession “In the course of a working day, Mr. Bond encounters transportation specialists, military analysts, [and] atomic scientists...Mr. Bond mingles with golf pros, travel guides, specimens of marine life.” If the

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*Pale King*, which follows the stultifying experience of a group of employees who work for the Internal Revenue Service in Peoria, Illinois (David Foster Wallace, *The Pale King: An Unfinished Novel* [New York: Little, Brown and Co., 2011]).

<sup>46</sup> Sloan Wilson, *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* (New York: Four Walls Eight Windows, 2002), 251.

monologue describes a managerial man that has been robbed of his masculine authority and forced into stultifying relationships with bureaucratic figures, the trailer's visual footage restores this figure's heroic masculinity. Physically, Bond overcomes his bureaucratic adversaries—the 'transportation specialist' is actually an undercover spy violently tossed from a vehicle by Bond, the 'military analyst' is an armed guard walking in a jungle swamp that Bond tackles from behind, and Bond puts an 'atomic scientist' in a hazmat suit into a stranglehold. Likewise, Bond epitomizes virile masculinity as he 'mingles' with a 'golf pro' (a half-naked woman playing putt-putt in her hotel room), a 'travel guide' (a woman lying in her bed on the telephone inviting Bond to join her), and a 'specimen of marine life' (Ursula Andress as Bond girl "Honey Rider" emerging from the sea in a bikini). Hence, Bond recovers his masculinity through consumption—a life of stiff drinks, fast cars, and beautiful women eases the travails of working with 'specialists', 'analysts', and 'scientists'. As these dramas show, the organization man's desire to conform was at odds with the dogma of capitalist individualism. Changes in management will address this incompatibility, seeking to bring management principles inline with neoliberalism's individualist rhetoric.

Early critiques of managerial life focused on the injustices of alienating, bureaucratic work—taking aim at the tedium of repetitive tasks and the loss of individual autonomy. In its first stage, the period roughly spanning the 1930s to the 1960s, management revolved around the "large, centralized, and bureaucratized industrial firm."<sup>47</sup> Adhering to the principles of long-term planning, management enacting policies designed to eliminate risk and ensure security. As management specialists Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello describe:

Emphasis was placed, on the one hand, on mechanisms for stabilizing and coordinating actions, strengthening institutional boundaries, and planning and bureaucratization; and,

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<sup>47</sup> Boltanski and Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, 428.

on the other, on an improvement in the living conditions of wage-earners, an increase in their purchasing power (by redistributing productivity increases), and the establishment of mechanisms of security thanks to which the welfare state was gradually constructed.<sup>48</sup>

Designed to protect against arbitrariness, management policies established clear hierarchies of command, defined avenues for merit-based promotion, and uniform procedures for determining wages. While these policies guaranteed greater job security, management texts continued to be haunted by the white-collar worker's growing sense of alienation. Boltanski and Chiapello use the term artistic critique to describe qualitative critiques of alienation, they explain:

[Artistic critique], rooted in the invention of a bohemian lifestyle...foregrounds the loss of meaning and, in particular, the loss of the sense of what is beautiful and valuable, which derives from standardization and generalized commodification, affecting not only everyday objects but also artworks (the cultural mercantilism of the bourgeoisie) and human beings. It stresses the objective impulse of capitalism and bourgeois society to regiment and dominate human beings, and subject them to work that it prescribes for the purpose of profit, while hypocritically invoking morality. To this it counterposes the freedom of artists, their rejection of any contamination of aesthetics by ethics, their refusal of any form of subjection in time and space and, in its extreme forms, of any kind of work.<sup>49</sup>

In the sphere of work, these demands manifested in the “denunciation of ‘hierarchical power,’ paternalism, authoritarianism, compulsory work schedules, prescribed tasks, the Taylorist separation between design and execution, and, more generally, the division of labour. Their positive counterpoint was demands for autonomy and self-management, and the promise of an unbounded liberation of human creativity.”<sup>50</sup> These concerns come to a head in the crisis of May ’68, articulated through qualitative demands of artistic critique. In the wake of May ’68, managerial practice gradually absorbed these demands, while abandoning the quantitative securities that had been the hallmark of the social democratic welfare state. By the 1990s,

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<sup>48</sup> Boltanski and Chiapello, 428.

<sup>49</sup> Boltanski and Chiapello, 38.

<sup>50</sup> Boltanski and Chiapello, 170.

management literature responded to the demands of artistic critique, promoting an “obsessive attention to adaptation, change, [and] ‘flexibility’.”<sup>51</sup> Boltanski and Chiapello explain, “In virtually all the texts, we find advice on implementing the flexible, inventive organization that will be able to ‘ride’ all ‘waves’, adapt to all the changes, always have a workforce that is up to date with the most recent knowledge, and secure a permanent technological advantage over competitors.”<sup>52</sup> In contrast to the stable hierarchical arrangement of large bureaucratic firms, ‘90s management literature emphasizes “lean firms working as networks with a multitude of participants, organizing work in the form of teams or projects, intent on customer satisfaction, and a general mobilization of workers.”<sup>53</sup> In rhetoric, the shift to sub-contracting, outsourcing, teamwork, multi-tasking, and temporary projects could be couched in the terms provided by artistic critique:

Far from being attached to an occupation or clinging to a qualification, the great man proves adaptable and flexible, able to switch from one situation to a very different one, and adjust to it; and versatile, capable of changing activity or tools, depending on the nature of the relationship entered into with others or with objects. It is precisely this adaptability and versatility that make him employable – that is to say, in the world of firms, to attach himself to new projects.<sup>54</sup>

This rhetoric fits well with the logic of neoliberalism, which cloaks the exploitative aspects of precarious labor in terms of greater individual freedoms. In practice, this shift entails the intensification of permanently part-time, hyper-flexibilized work. In contrast to the rigid, hierarchical structure of white-collar work, Andrew Ross designates this new class of flexibilized workers ‘no-collar’, emblemized by the part-time consultant, “Over the course of the 1990s, this model was much emulated. ‘Consultant’ became the fastest growing job description, if not

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<sup>51</sup> Boltanski and Chiapello, 71.

<sup>52</sup> Boltanski and Chiapello, 71.

<sup>53</sup> Boltanski and Chiapello, 73.

<sup>54</sup> Boltanski and Chiapello, 112.

the fastest growing job category, and segued into the phenomenon of the ‘free agent’—in New Economy parlance a skilled but flexible worker with no enduring company loyalties beyond the terms of the contract.”<sup>55</sup> As Ross explains, the economic precarity of the no-collar class is cast in the glow of artistic freedom:

A large part of the attraction of the free agent profile draws on the appeal to Bohemian glamour. What are the consequences of this desire to assume the trappings of the artist? First of all, let us be clear that it is an invitation to underpayment. Artists’ traditions of sacrificial labour are governed by the principle of the cultural discount, by which artists and other arts’ workers accept non-monetary rewards—the gratification of producing art—as compensation for their work, thereby discounting the cash price of their labour. Indeed, it must be acknowledged that the largest subsidy to the arts has always come from workers themselves. The mythology of the ‘starving artist’ is rooted in the political economy of the creative professions, and the historical legacy of their emergence from the mould of aristocratic patronage.<sup>56</sup>

The temporarily employed freelancer, liberated from fixed attachments, becomes the ‘self-entrepreneur’ of his own labor, no matter that he could be let go by his employer at any moment. As “autonomy was exchanged against security,”<sup>57</sup> work becomes more creative and superficially fulfilling, at the expense of greater economic gains. Boltanski and Chiapello describe this state of insecurity as the “mark of an elimination of the purchase that people can have on their social environment, with a consequent fading of their belief in the future as a vanishing point which can orientate action and thus retrospectively confer meaning on the present.”<sup>58</sup> Reframing exploitive labor practices as artistic liberation, contemporary managerial practice finds its justification in artistic critique. This state of affairs has tremendous consequences for artists, who must now reconsider the function of critique in their practice. If artistic practice is essentially a form of

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<sup>55</sup> Andrew Ross, *Nice Work If You Can Get It: Life and Labor in Precarious Times* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 79.

<sup>56</sup> Ross, 80.

<sup>57</sup> Boltanski and Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, 430.

<sup>58</sup> Boltanski and Chiapello, 421.

permanently part-time, hyper-flexible, contract-based work couched in the terms of artistic critique, what remains of art's critical function? Gillick's work makes critics uneasy, precisely because it occupies this corrupted zone of feel-good managerial speak. The work doesn't maintain some kind of ironic distance that we can easily recognize as critique.

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### *The Allure of Improvement*

If Gillick's practice registers the area of bureaucratic management and planning, it does so by focusing on its moment of transition, tracking the move toward greater flexibility in the sphere of work. This shift coincides with the disruption of the institutional powers once guaranteed by the welfare state—a moment identified by Gilles Deleuze as the “crisis of the institutions.”<sup>59</sup> In his “Postscript on the Societies of Control,” Deleuze traces the dissolution of discrete sites of disciplinary enclosure—the prison, hospital, factory, school, and family; those “different internments or spaces of enclosure through which the individual passes are independent variables: each time one is supposed to start from zero, and although a common language for all these places exists, it is *analogical*.”<sup>60</sup> In place of discrete institutional enclosures, contemporary mechanisms of control are diffuse and adaptable; these “different control mechanisms are inseparable variations, forming a system of variable geometry.”<sup>61</sup> Elaborating on the distinction, Deleuze continues, “Enclosures are *molds*, distinct castings, but controls are a *modulation*, like a self-deforming cast that will continuously change from one

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<sup>59</sup> Gilles Deleuze, “Postscript on the Societies of Control,” *October* 59 (1992): 7.

<sup>60</sup> Deleuze, 4.

<sup>61</sup> Deleuze, 4.

moment to the other, or like a sieve whose mesh will transmute from point to point.”<sup>62</sup> This condition of modulation is the hallmark of post-Fordist managerial work; it rears its head in demands for perpetual training, temporary employment, and part-time contract work.

In the case of art, what formats are best suited to systems of permanent modulation? New tools are necessary to confront disperse modes of power that are constantly shifting, adapting, and improving. For Gillick’s work, the scenario provides a useful prototype for perpetual modulation—a guidebook, of sorts, for tactical postponement, deferral, and delay. This is why Gillick places so much emphasis on the Cold War think tank, whose strategies migrate away from planning to scenario thinking, and, in doing so, become the paradigmatic structure of the flexibilized neoliberal present. After all, it was the Cold War think tank that sounded the death knell of disciplinarity, breaking up sites of enclosure in the name of group work and collaboration. As Pamela Lee has shown, the foundational protocols of the Cold War think tank—systems theory and operational research—were consistent with emerging forms of interdisciplinarity in the visual arts. Following Lee’s lead, I hope to trace “the peculiar ‘aesthetic’ of the postwar think tank, not as a matter of appearance, period style, or literal design—the decorative addenda, one might say, of the Cold War—but as an institutionally sanctioned sensibility stemming from its innovative research techniques.”<sup>63</sup> No structure better encapsulates this sensibility than the scenario, guided, as it were, by the principles of modularity, duplication, and adaptation. Scenario planning originates with Herman Kahn of the RAND Corporation, who developed a “technique of ‘future-now’ thinking, aiming through the use of detailed analysis plus

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<sup>62</sup> Deleuze, 4.

<sup>63</sup> Pamela M. Lee, “Aesthetic Strategist: Albert Wohlstetter, the Cold War, and a Theory of Mid-Century Modernism,” *October* (October 1, 2011): 17. These ideas are expanded in Pamela M. Lee, *Think Tank Aesthetics: Midcentury Modernism, the Cold War, and the Neoliberal Present* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2020).

imagination to be able to produce a report as it might be written by people living in the future.”<sup>64</sup>

RAND pioneered a new approach to policy research based on “systems analysis”—a method for modeling hypothetical situations and then simulating the possible outcomes of different courses of action. RAND’s future-oriented approach marked a major innovation:

Unlike operations research, which is applied to existing systems to improve them—such as in improving the accuracy of an aircraft in bombing—the more advanced form of analysis is applied to complex questions of choice among alternative future systems... It is not a formal mode of analysis with prescribed dicta but rather a conceptual approach calling for the assemblage of a maximum range of disciplines and research skills to look at a single problem.<sup>65</sup>

While employed at RAND, Herman Kahn developed his particular brand of future-oriented systems analysis: scenario planning. As Paul Dickson elaborates in his history of RAND:

Scenario-writing is now a well-known technique largely developed at RAND as an aid to strategic thinking. It calls for a careful attempt to write an artificial script of future events as a means of provoking thought about as yet unraised policy questions. Advocates of scenario-writing see their technique as an aid to the imagination, a device which, they contend, forces one to consider realistic details rather than abstract concepts, raises possibilities that may not occur in normal analysis, sets up and forces one to think about future alternatives, and focuses on the interaction of events.<sup>66</sup>

While Kahn’s scenarios incorporated quantitative analysis, the analyst also emphasized the importance of intuition and imagination. Purportedly, Kahn adopted the term scenario from Hollywood terminology “because he liked the emphasis it gave, not so much on forecasting, but

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<sup>64</sup> Ringland, *Scenario Planning*, 12. An acronym for “research and development,” RAND was founded in 1945 as a joint collaboration between the US Air Force and the Douglas Aircraft Company. Established as a “program of study and research on the broad subject of intercontinental warfare,” (Project RAND Contract, quoted in Paul Dickson, *Think Tanks* [New York: Atheneum, 1971], 55). RAND’s original objective was to develop warfare technology. However, by the 1960s, RAND had expanded its operational purview beyond military applications to include everything from medical research to education policy to urban planning. For more on how military think tanks turned their attention to domestic policy, see: Jennifer S Light, *From Warfare to Welfare: Defense Intellectuals and Urban Problems in Cold War America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003).

<sup>65</sup> Dickson, *Think Tanks*, 68.

<sup>66</sup> Dickson, 64.

on creating a story or myth.”<sup>67</sup> According to Kahn, analysts should “stretch the imagination” and “be more willing to consider seriously the unlikely and bizarre.”<sup>68</sup> Future scenarios could traverse the unlikely and bizarre because they were not meant to be forecasts or predictions about what would happen in the future. Rather, analysts should envision all possible futures so that informed decisions could be made about any potential scenario. The scenario approach conditioned a particular kind of collaborative work, one that lay outside of the traditional silos of expertise. In particular, Kahn argued that scenarios should “illuminate the interaction of psychological, social, economic, cultural, political, and military factors” and the analyst advocated interdisciplinary methods that required collaboration from experts in a range of fields.<sup>69</sup> Thus, with scenarios, analysts could examine multiple variables interacting with one another, rather than considering a single element in isolation. To ensure the best results, an exhaustive, possibly infinite, number of scenarios would need to be dreamed up. Kahn described his strategy as “a kind of planned muddling through,” as his strategy relied on the accumulation of more and more information.<sup>70</sup>

As such, the scenario privileges a state of perpetual improvement—research doubles over itself, information accumulates, and results are continually deferred. Rather than delivering a

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<sup>67</sup> Ringland, *Scenario Planning*, 12. In the early days, RAND employed mostly mathematicians and engineers, but were ill equipped to deal with the contingencies of human nature, they brought on Leo Rosten—a Hollywood screenwriter—to help predict how the pilot would react to various situations (Alex Abella, *Soldiers of Reason: The Rand Corporation and the Rise of the American Empire* [Orlando: Harcourt, 2008], ff. 24).

<sup>68</sup> Herman Kahn, *The Alternative World Futures Approach* (Croton-on-Hudson, NY: Hudson Institute, 1966); reprinted as “A Methodological Framework: The Alternative World Futures Approach,” in *The Essential Herman Kahn: In Defense of Thinking*, ed. Paul Dragoş Aligică and Kenneth R Weinstein (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2009), 182.

<sup>69</sup> Kahn, *The Alternative World Futures Approach*; reprinted as “A Methodological Framework: The Alternative World Futures Approach,” 181.

<sup>70</sup> Herman Kahn, *The Essential Herman Kahn: In Defense of Thinking*, ed. Paul Dragoş Aligică and Kenneth R Weinstein (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2009), 164.

specific product or technology, RAND foregrounded continuous research, an attribute that contributed to the group's reputation as a center for "Research and No Development," a play on the RAND acronym. In its early stages, RAND expended considerable energies convincing the Department of Defense that developing weaponry was effectively useless without basic research on the military's objectives. In other words, RAND could not develop the best product for the DoD without first understanding how the military arrived at decisions about what it wanted and then determining the biases influencing those desires. In an internal memo, RAND researcher Richard R. Nelson elaborated on the necessity of such an approach, explaining, "The undertakeing [sic] of parallel R and D projects when there is considerable uncertainty with respect to which of several alternatives is best."<sup>71</sup> Ultimately, RAND's success depended on selling the DoD on the value of the never-ending research contract. Analysts argued that all decisions be deferred to the future, "The best decision to make on the basis of some information may be to delay a final decision until more information is obtained."<sup>72</sup> At RAND, analyst Burton Klein summed up the scenario method with the motto "more competition, duplication, and confusion."<sup>73</sup> Ideally, there should be no criteria for embarking on a specific course of research; only with the pure accumulation of information could analysts, in retrospect, determine if a particular avenue of inquiry was successful.

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<sup>71</sup> Richard R. Nelson, "The Economics of Parallel R and D Efforts: A Sequential-Decision Analysis" (RAND Corporation, November 12, 1959), 1, RM-2482.

<sup>72</sup> Nelson, 4.

<sup>73</sup> Burton Klein, "A Radical Proposal for R. and D.," *Fortune* 57 (May 1958); quoted in David A. Hounshell, "The Medium Is the Message, or How Context Matters: The Rand Corporation Builds an Economics of Innovation, 1946–1962," in *Systems, Experts, and Computers: The Systems Approach in Management and Engineering, World War II and After*, ed. Agatha C. Hughes and Thomas P. Hughes (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2000), 283. Klein's remarks were in direct response to the government's complaints about the "wasteful duplication" of RAND's military research.

Like RAND's scenario approach, Gillick's practice foregrounds research over production, emphasizing renovation and improvement, rather than finite results. In the *Discussion Island* novel, the think tank never completes their stated task; the 'predictive report' remains unfinished. The characters explain:

We are very interested in the idea of our reports being provisional. The idea of potential as a dominant indicator of viability while working towards a series of concepts seems much more radical to us than the distilled, concluded research.<sup>74</sup>

Throughout the text, even communication evades completion. Confusion grows as the characters find it increasingly difficult to communicate with each other. The analysts "enter a post-communication situation," an email is sent to a list of recipients, "but as yet the message goes unread."<sup>75</sup> Later, "two other scenarios arrive, but the texts are corrupted. Only the titles of attached files make it through."<sup>76</sup> Failing to clearly communicate, the think tank's final report remains incomplete: "It's a fact that the research presentation [and] digital communication...finally shown to committee, is very short. Data is missing."<sup>77</sup> The lack of a final solution is instructive; results are deferred to the future. The novel explains:

The stuff that leaks out fulfills certain functions that authorised results cannot easily cope with...The idea of potential as a dominant indicator of viability while working towards a series of concepts seems much more radical to us than the distilled, concluded research. Our ambiguous relation to any report and to its history is an aspect of our ability to be a site for future thinking. Each of our constructions is prototypical and provisional.<sup>78</sup>

Like the mistaken floor in the Big Conference Centre, ruptures, miscommunications, and oversights provide openings for projective thinking; areas of omission or absence ensure that conclusions and results are perpetually deferred, keeping the potential of the future alive.

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<sup>74</sup> Gillick, "Discussion Island," 159.

<sup>75</sup> Gillick, 152.

<sup>76</sup> Gillick, 186.

<sup>77</sup> Gillick, 191.

<sup>78</sup> Gillick, 159.

Spatially, the flexibility of the scenario model finds its architectural analog in the “allure of improvement” at the heart of what Rem Koolhaas terms “Junkspace”:

Dedicated to instant gratification, Junkspace accommodates seeds of future perfection; a language of apology is woven through its texture of canned euphoria; ‘pardon our appearance’ signs or miniature yellow ‘sorry’ billboards mark ongoing patches of wetness, announce momentary discomfort in return for imminent shine, the allure of improvement... Judging the built presumed a static condition; now each architecture embodies opposite conditions simultaneously: old and new, permanent and temporary, flourishing and at risk ... Sections undergo an Alzheimer’s-like deterioration as others are upgraded. Because Junkspace is endless, it is never closed ... Renovation and restoration were procedures that took place in your absence; now you’re a witness, a reluctant participant.<sup>79</sup>

Adaptability and mobility are built into the fabric of Junkspace, the promise of completion always deferred to a projected future. This hyper-adaptable, provisional zone of improvement is central to Gillick’s practice. The deliberately overlooked 22<sup>nd</sup> floor of the Big Conference Center epitomizes this condition—a space purposefully left undecided, so that it could be improved upon at a future date. Likewise, Gillick’s gallery installations evoke the atmosphere of renovation—the provisional platform and the temporary wall partition, being the structures that appear most frequently in the artist’s repertoire.

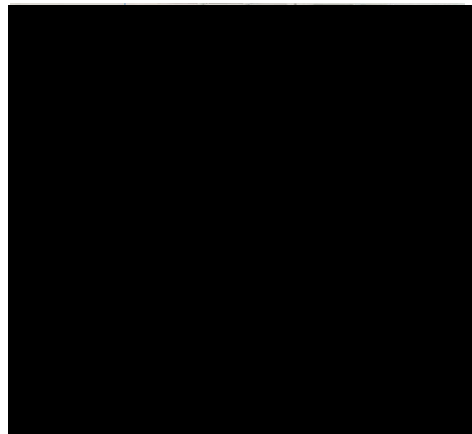


Figure 2.5. Liam Gillick, *The Wood Way*, 2002, installation view, Whitechapel Gallery, London.

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<sup>79</sup> Rem Koolhaas, “Junkspace,” *October* 100 (2002): 179.

In 2002, *The Wood Way*, a major exhibition of Gillick’s discussion platforms and screens, opened at the Whitechapel Art Gallery in London. The exhibition’s title was derived from the German “Holzweg”—literally meaning the “wood way,” but also connoting the complicated route, the more difficult path, or the wrong way.<sup>80</sup> The sculptures included in the exhibition were created over a period of five years (the earliest dating to 1997) and exist as autonomous standalone objects. At Whitechapel, Gillick constructed a maze of slatted walls that united the sculptures into a single architectural environment [Figure 2.5]. Emphasizing the atmosphere of renovation, the unfinished pinewood planking resembled the bare wooden framing walls of a construction project.<sup>81</sup> Taking note of the pre-fab, disposable aesthetic of the show, curator Anthony Spira likened the installation to “a mock IKEA self-assembly kit into which the screens and platforms are slotted.”<sup>82</sup> This temporary framing device heightened the exhibition’s sense of flexibility, as if the sculptures could be rearranged into any number of modular configurations.



Figure 2.6. Liam Gillick, *The Wood Way*, 2002; installation view, Whitechapel Gallery, London; *Conveyance*, 2001, anodized aluminum and opaque Plexiglas (left) and *Obediens*, 2001, anodized aluminum and opaque Plexiglas (right).

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<sup>80</sup> The title alludes to Heidegger’s book *Holzwege*, translated into English as *Off the Beaten Track*. Martin Heidegger, *Holzwege* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 2015).

<sup>81</sup> According to Gillick, the structure was not intended to be an artwork, “The decision to put labels on the wooden structure was to make sure you didn’t confuse it for a big sculpture.” (Alex Farquharson, “Applied Art: Liam Gillick in Conversation with Alex Farquharson,” *Untitled*, 2002, 22).

<sup>82</sup> Gillick and Spira, “Speculation and Planning,” 15.

The sculptures themselves played out a number of permutational games, as if different data were being plugged into a computational scenario. *Conveyaunce* and *Obediens*, two waist-high screens of identical proportions, sat side-by-side, at first seeming to be serial repetitions executed respectively in yellow and orange. Careful comparison revealed a complex play of modular variation [Figure 2.6]. The verso of *Conveyaunce* (2001) featured three panels of Plexiglas, beginning with a large band of yellow, followed by an empty medium-sized panel, a narrow panel of neutral ivory, and finally a medium panel of yellow. The recto replicated the dimensions of the panels, only rotated 180 degrees, so that, from top to bottom, the panels progress from medium, to narrow, to medium, to large. Though identical in dimension, the color schemes of the panels varied, with the verso reading color, empty, neutral, color and the recto reading color, empty, neutral, neutral.

It is only by comparing *Conveyaunce* with *Obediens* that the logic undergirding the coloring became clear. The panel structure of *Obediens* was identical to *Conveyaunce*, however, the sculpture has been turned around so that the outward facing front panel matched the dimensions of *Conveyaunce*'s rear panel. Because of the 180-degree rotational symmetry internal to each sculpture, flipping one sculpture around created a situation in which the verso of *Obediens* (2001) replicated the panel dimensions of *Conveyaunce*, only rotated 180 degrees. While the panel dimensions mapped onto one another, Gillick altered the scheme so that the empty medium band of *Conveyaunce* was filled in on *Obediens* and the filled narrow band of *Conveyaunce* appeared empty on *Obediens*. This seemingly random intervention allowed for greater consistency across all four panels, as the second band from the top remained empty.

Yet, the color schemes of the recto panels continued to complicate the overall sense of repetition and difference. On the recto of *Conveyaunce*, the pattern of the panel dimensions was

identical to the verso of *Obediens*; from top to bottom the scheme read medium, narrow, medium, large. Likewise, the recto of *Obediens* replicated the panel scheme of *Conveyaunce*'s verso; large, medium, narrow, medium. And, in these two cases, the empty panels remained constant. However, the colors of the panels were inverted, with *Conveyaunce*'s recto reading from top to bottom, color, empty, neutral, neutral and *Obediens*' verso reading neutral, empty, color, color. Likewise, *Obediens*' recto (neutral, empty, color, neutral) inverted the color scheme of *Conveyaunce*'s verso (color, empty, neutral, color).

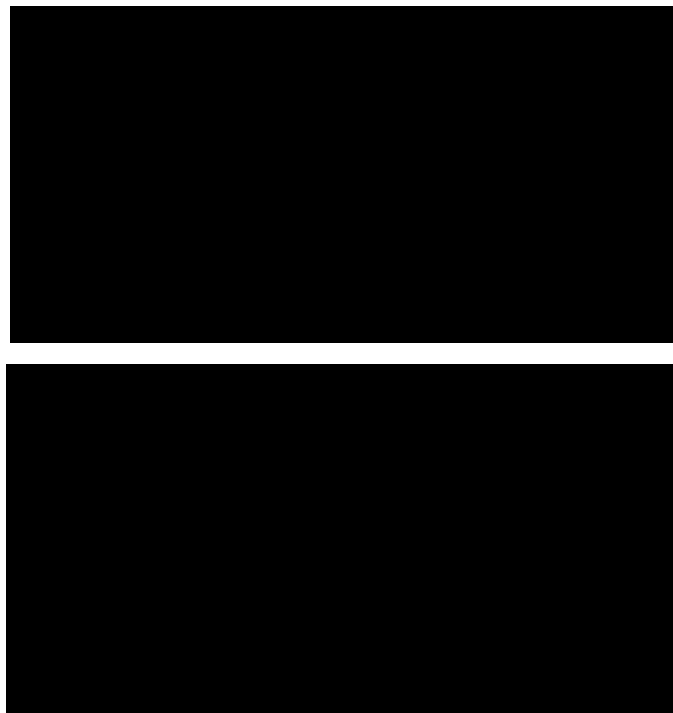


Figure 2.7. Liam Gillick, *Everything Good Goes*, 2008, video stills.

I give time over to this dry, technical description of the works, because reviewers often gloss over the complex permutational games played out in Gillick's sculptures, in favor of generalized references to corporate décor. Gillick's sculptures index labor. Close looking congers the artist in front of the computer, clicking the mouse, performing a never-ending set of modulations. And, it is precisely this persona that Gillick dons in his 2008 video *Everything*

*Good Goes* [Figure 2.7]. As the video opens, the camera pans across a minimalist white and chrome workspace. The soundtrack pipes in a recording of Gillick’s voice—a long voicemail left for the Fly collective in New York, the film crew Gillick collaborated with for the work. Delivered as a stream-of-consciousness monologue, Gillick’s voiceover is filled with missteps, redirections, and revisions as the artist touches on a set of loosely related concepts—the factory, flexibility, modernism, immaterial labor, collectivity, and the struggle between speculation and planning:

Maybe it’s redundancy following the lure of infinite flexibility, remember we’re redundant at this point in the story, we have got lots of time.

[...]

The notion of the permanent part-time worker. This is not my idea. The idea that the danger for the artist, certain artists now, and certain structures now is that they have become a perfect mirror of the ideal kind of Sarkoziastic vision of the day after tomorrow in France. The post 35 hour week, infinitely flexible, very adaptable, very able to turn ourselves to certain things. We have to question how closely a discursive structure comes close to that seminarized, flexibilized, hot-desked, kind of zombie discourse. Not pure zombie maybe, but zombies with agency.<sup>83</sup>

Mirroring the “redundancy following the lure of flexibility,” the language simultaneously doubles over itself—as in the repeated permutations flexibility, flexible, flexibilized and the patch-worked references to ‘Sarkoziastic vision’ and ‘zombie discourse’. As the voice continues the camera pans to a person, face unseen, sitting at a desk behind an Apple computer attempting to construct from memory a 3D computer model of the Salumi Factory from the film *Tout va bien* by Jean-Luc Godard and Pierre Gorin. Made in the wake of May ’68, Godard and Gorin’s film follows a wildcat strike during which workers sequester the factory manager in his office for five days. The film set—a two-story cross-section of the factory, divided by walls into six

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<sup>83</sup> Liam Gillick, “Everything Good Goes,” *Piano*, no. 2 (2008): 7.

distinct enclosures—allows the camera to capture the activities of the workers in different rooms simultaneously. In Gillick’s video, the endlessly shifting permutations of the architectural rendering seem to mirror the artist’s meandering monologue. As Gillick suggests in the audio recording, it is this space of redundant flexibility that might offer the possibility of “putting something just out of reach...working towards the idea of creating a predictive model, that doesn’t actually work as a functional projection because it always becomes a promise just out of reach.”<sup>84</sup> Here, the difference between the post-industrial knowledge worker and the artist is subtle but significant; Gillick explains:

Within the realm of the knowledge worker, the new consumer is always activated and treated as a discriminating individual who can be marketed to directly—spoken to face to face...The exhaustion created by the continual capitalization of the recent past and the near future has its source in the knowledge worker’s attempt to account for every differentiation, whereas the artist is producing every differentiation alongside the recipient of the work.

This dynamic is linked to a game the artist plays with control over the moment of completion.<sup>85</sup>

Whereas the knowledge worker must mobilize flexibility to produce a product that can account for the many differences demanded by consumers, the artist might constantly defer the moment of a work’s completion, using flexibility to contribute to the constantly shifting array of differences rather than producing a finished product.

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<sup>84</sup> Gillick, 7.

<sup>85</sup> Gillick, “The Good of Work,” 4.



Figure 2.8. Liam Gillick, *Discussion Island: Projected Think Tank*, 1997, anodised aluminum, Plexiglas; installation view, Basilico Fine Arts Gallery, New York, 1997.

In Gillick's practice, the viewer does not complete the work. While Gillick suggests that projected spaces might provide provisional zones for discussion, he does not mean that his installations should be used as literal places to talk. As Sean Keller explains, "The fact that Gillick creates works called discussion platforms does not mean that he intends anything so direct as for them to be places to talk. Indeed his slick aesthetic suggests the opposite: his works function more as chilly icons of unrealized interaction than as vehicles for interaction itself."<sup>86</sup> Take, for example, *Discussion Island: Projected Think Tank*; a cube with an open base and top constructed from three dark translucent panes of Plexiglas and a single panel of an opaque cream-colored Plexiglas [Figure 2.8]. The wall text suggests possible uses for the open space described by the *Think Tank's* four sides: "the work may be used as an object that might signify an enclosed zone for the consideration of exchange, information transfer and strategy."<sup>87</sup> However, confronted with the work, I am not immediately moved to action. Measuring 120 centimeters on each side, *Projected Think Tank* is relatively small, it is not as if a group of people are meant to sit in it and conduct a conversation or produce a report. Although Gillick

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<sup>86</sup> Keller, "Liam Gillick," 189.

<sup>87</sup> Gillick, *Liam Gillick*, 56.

creates these works under the heading “Discussion Island,” the artist is completely disinterested in rousing a participatory response. Rather than compel viewers into conversation, Gillick’s installations point to the absence of activity. Rather than solicit immediate action, the work facilitates protracted thought processes, placing viewers in an open-ended scenario in which they must project their own conclusions and results.

At the end of his Utopia Station essay, Gillick quotes from Theodor Adorno’s 1969 “Resignation”:

The utopian impulse in thinking is all the stronger, the less it objectifies itself as utopia—a further form of regression—whereby it sabotages its own realisation. Open thinking points beyond itself. For its part, such thinking takes a position as a figuration of praxis, which is more closely related to a praxis truly involved in change than in a position of mere obedience for the sake of praxis. Beyond all specialized and particular content, thinking is actually and above all the force of resistance, alienated from resistance only with great effort.<sup>88</sup>

In the text, Adorno responds to the charge that his scholarship had confined itself to theory at the expense of performing any real actions to change society. In the end, the theorist proclaims that thinking itself is the strongest form of resistance, he explains, “At the present moment, no higher form of society is concretely visible: for that reason, anything that seems in easy reach is regressive... the uncompromisingly critical thinker, who neither subscribes his conscience nor permits himself to be terrorized into action, is in truth the one who does not give up...As long as thinking is not interrupted, it has a firm grasp upon possibility.”<sup>89</sup> Over three decades later, when it seems that the utopian projects of the Left have all but resigned, the obdurate inexhaustibility of Gillick’s practice demands more thinking. The books, gallery installations, design commissions,

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<sup>88</sup> Theodor Adorno, “Resignation,” quoted in Gillick, “Utopia Station: For a ... Functional Utopia,” 282.

<sup>89</sup> Theodor W Adorno, “Resignation,” in *Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 202.

films and architecture are concrete actions Gillick uses to keep thought moving; there is always more and more information to uncover in the work, as we try to make sense of it all we actively participate in scenario thinking and become better able to think about and change the course of the future.

### Chapter Three: “Each *repetition* is a reformulation”: Pierre Huyghe’s *Streamside Day*

Pierre Huyghe stages experiences. Over the course of his career, the artist has choreographed a celebration for a suburban community (*Streamside Day*, 2003); filled a playground with group of costumed mascots (*La Toison d’or*, 1993); turned a drop ceiling into an arcade game (*Atari Light*, 1999); organized a party celebrating Charles Boycott (*The Boycott Party*, 1999); conceived a theme park for the Musée de la Compagnie des Indes (*Ectoplasm*, 2001, with François Roche); and arranged an opera in New York’s Central Park (*Double Negative, A Journey that Wasn’t*, 2005) [Figure 3.1]. Huyghe’s artworks hew closely to popular forms of entertainment—Disney cartoons, blockbuster films, video games, and commercialized holidays, for example.<sup>1</sup> Throughout these gestures, Huyghe crafts encounters that participate in and challenge the regulatory flows of leisure time, offering possible ways that art might conceive experience differently. The last chapter examined Liam Gillick’s artistic response to the emergence of a new managerial figure, characterized by the shift from the bureaucratic ‘organization man’ to the hyper-flexible ‘network man’. As we have seen, Gillick willfully adopts this persona, projecting himself as “the artist in front of the computer, clicking the mouse,

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<sup>1</sup> Huyghe’s interest in the commercial dimensions of entertainment and celebration was likely informed by the rapid intrusion of American consumerism into French cultural life in the early 1990s. For example, it would be difficult to separate *Blanche-Neige Lucie* (1997), a film about the actress who dubbed the voice of Snow White for the French version of the Disney movie, from the fact that Disneyland Paris first opened in 1992. Huyghe frequently references recent cultural imports like Halloween, which only began to be celebrated in France in the 1990s. See Huyghe’s text “Halloweenism,” in which the artist declares, “A new tradition has arrived: Halloween! It has its own rituals, date on the calendar, and merchandising. With Halloween, all social, religious or political dimensions are absent, enabling the possible recuperation of this generic holiday in which merchandising is celebrated. (Pierre Huyghe, Liam Gillick, and Philippe Parreno, *Pierre Huyghe: the trial* [Munich: Kunstverein, 2000], 190).

performing a never-ending set of modulations.”<sup>2</sup> Caught within an endless series of permutations, Gillick’s work sidesteps embodied experience. If anything, Gillick’s Plexiglas sculptures are decidedly un-participatory, resisting viewers’ attempts to project themselves into the real space of the work. As such, Gillick’s practice engages with the anxieties surrounding dematerialized labor, typified by the virtual information worker, floating in screen space, all avatar and no soul. Against this specter, lived experience—material, bodily, spatial—seemingly serves an ameliorative function—a way to balance out the ravages of the precarious management economy.<sup>3</sup> Responding to the perceived disembodiment of networked life, the art of the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries has trended towards experiential encounters that privilege participation, interactivity, and collaboration.<sup>4</sup> Likewise, driven by calls to be more open, populist, and

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<sup>2</sup> See p. TK of this volume.

<sup>3</sup> The word experience has a long and complex history. Rather than impose a rigid ‘authentic’ meaning on the term, I would like to keep these ambiguities in mind. When ‘experience’ crops up in museum discourse, it is useful to remember that the concept gets mobilized towards different and often competing ends. The lively debate around experience in the field of hermeneutics can help give a sense of the textures and resonances that attach to the concept. For example, much has been made of the distinction in the German language between *Erlebnis* and *Erfahrung*—terms that translate into the single English word ‘experience’. Generally speaking, *Erlebnis* (containing the German root for life, *leben*) refers to ‘lived experience’ and tends to connote a more immediate sensation. While *Erfahrung* (containing the root for journey, *fahren*) expresses an extended temporality associated with learning, more equivalent to how we might describe a knowledgeable person as ‘experienced’ in the English language. The slipperiness between these two understandings has allowed museums to claim a populist, anti-elitist stance (immediate sensation, no prior knowledge needed), while also claiming an educational mission (experiences provide cultural training and produce knowledgeable subjects). For a summary of the philosophical history surrounding experience, see Martin Jay, *Songs of Experience: Modern American and European Variations on a Universal Theme*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

<sup>4</sup> The desire to return to the bodily has likewise shaped the humanities, see for example Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, *Production of Presence: What Meaning Cannot Convey* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2004). Gumbrecht describes the discipline’s turn away from theorization in the 1980s as part of a growing desire to restore “presence effects” to “meaning effects.” That is, to privilege effects brought about by the encounter between human beings and the things of the world.

accessible, museums have increasingly embraced artworks that promote social engagement—either by facilitating the active participation of visitors or by working directly in local communities. At the same time, the rising “experience economy” has refashioned experience itself into a marketing buzzword that can be attached to even the most emptied forms of commercialized spectacle.<sup>5</sup> As the experiential museum flourishes, artists are left to question if and how their work differs from the logic of the experience economy. Against this backdrop, artists such as Pierre Huyghe have taken up the concept of experience—both an economic structure and a constitutive fact of contemporary art-making—as the primary format for their work.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Coined in 1998 by business consultants B. Joseph Pine and James H. Gilmore, the “experience economy” describes a new economic offering where companies orchestrate immersive encounters for consumers. See Gilmore and Pine, “Welcome to the Experience Economy.”

<sup>6</sup> Here, I follow the lead of David Joselit, who distinguishes formats from mediums to describe the more capacious ways in which contemporary artists are integrating content into their work, he writes, “Formats are dynamic mechanisms for aggregating content. In mediums a material substrate (such as paint on canvas) converges with an aesthetic tradition (such as painting). Ultimately, mediums lead to objects, and thus reification, but formats are nodal connections and differential fields; they channel an unpredictable array of ephemeral currents and charges. They are configurations of force rather than discrete objects. In short, formats establish a pattern of links or connections.” (David Joselit, *After Art* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013], 55). More recently, artists such as Maria Hassabi, Cally Spooner, and Paulina Olowska have used the temporal formats of dance and theater to choreograph experiences that foreground slowness, as a way of resisting neoliberalism’s predilection for productivity, urgency, and constant momentum. See Andre Lepecki, *Exhausting Dance: Performance and the Politics of Movement* (New York: Routledge, 2006). These practices are the subject of *The Paradox of Stillness*, a group exhibition at the Walker Art Center, which I co-curated with Vincenzo de Bellis. On the relationship between stillness and neoliberalism, see especially Hendrik Folkerts’ catalogue essay “Still Living,” in *The Paradox of Stillness: Art, Object, and Performance*, ed. Vincenzo De Bellis (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 2020), 283–94.

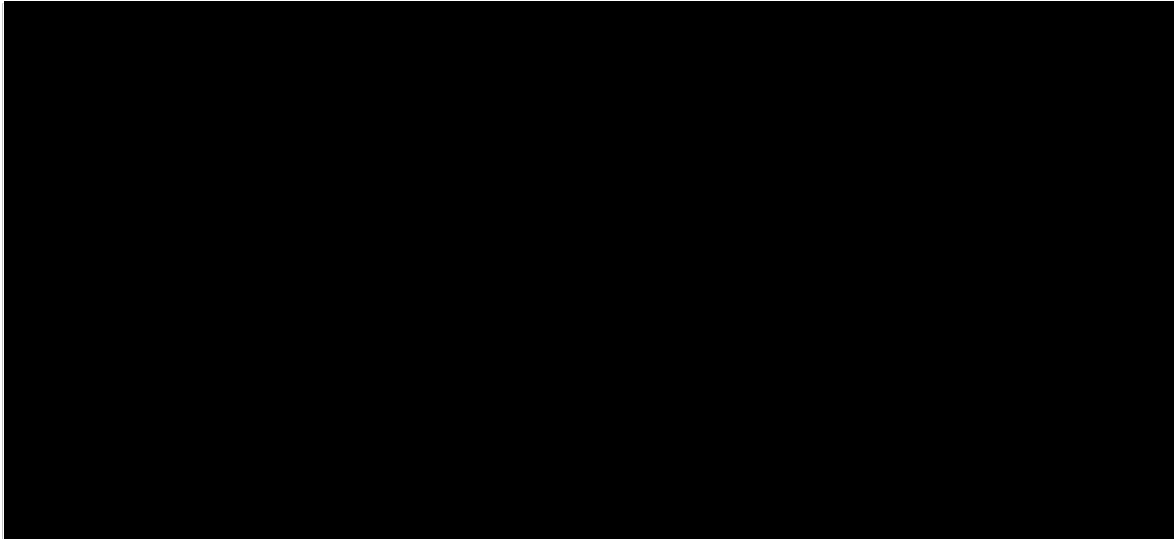


Figure 3.1. Selection of Pierre Huyghe's experiential works. Left to right, top to bottom: Pierre Huyghe, *Streamside Day*, 2003, film still; *La Toison d'Or*, 1993, event, Jardin de l'Arquebuse, Dijon, April 1993; Atari Light, 1999, computer game program, interface, joysticks, halogen lamps; *The Boycott Party*, 1999, postcard; *Le Procès du Temps Libre*, 1999, installation view; *Ectoplasm*, 2001, digital rendering (with François Roche); *A Journey that Wasn't*, 2005, video still.

The experiential turn in contemporary art has roots in the public art practices that emerged in the 1970s, which foregrounded collaboration with municipalities and community organizations. As art historian Miwon Kwon describes, “The incorporation of site specificity as a programmatic imperative by local, state, and national public art agencies in the mid-1970s encouraged the development of a design team approach in which artists were asked to collaborate with architects in producing or refurbishing public spaces, such as urban plazas, waterfront promenades, neighborhood parks, and office lobbies.”<sup>7</sup> These projects often ran parallel with civic efforts to revitalize (and sometimes gentrify) neighborhoods or deliver social services to communities in need. As Kwon has argued, many public art projects, geared towards humanizing public space, privileged functionality:

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<sup>7</sup> Kwon, *One Place after Another*, 5.

Meant to equalize the creative authority of artists and architects in the design of public spaces, this mode of site specificity presumed the humanizing influence of art over the inhumanity of urban architecture. The ideology of functional utility, foundational to the modernist ethos of architecture and urban design, came to overtake the essentialism of formalist beauty, traditionally associated with art; site-specific public art now needed to be ‘useful’.<sup>8</sup>

Thus, the artist-turned-consultant adopted the role of urban planner or social worker, facilitating collaboration between a team of city officials, architects, engineers, and community members. As governments and corporations encouraged community-centered projects, the artist acted like an ethnographer, closely observing a community in order to design useful works geared towards the specific needs of a given place.<sup>9</sup> Often, the artist in question would come from outside of the community, potentially reifying the otherness of already marginalized communities.<sup>10</sup> And, as Hal Foster has argued, the authority of the artist or host institution rarely received scrutiny, “Few principles of the ethnographic participant-observer are observed, let alone critiqued, and only limited engagement of the community is effected. Almost naturally the project strays from

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<sup>8</sup> Kwon, 5. Kwon points to the controversy surrounding Richard Serra’s *Titled Arc* as a counterargument to the functionalist approach, Serra’s sculpture incited anger precisely because it failed to be ‘useful’ and actually impeded the public’s use of space.

<sup>9</sup> One of the foremost advocates for public art, Suzanne Lacy has emphasized the need for community-centered projects “based on engagement” that could “communicate and interact with a broad and diversified audience about issues directly relevant to their lives.” (Lacy, *Mapping the Terrain*, 9). In particular, Lacy takes issue with so-called “plop art,” works that were simply placed in public spaces to beautify plazas with little regard to the context of the site or the surrounding community.

<sup>10</sup> As Miwon Kwon has shown, artists also experience considerable institutional pressure to engage with particular communities, often a result of reductive assumptions about the artist’s own identity and otherness. For example, when the African American artist Reneé Green was invited to participate in the Sculpture Chicago exhibition *Culture in Action* (1993), her two-day visit to the city consisted of prearranged tours to impoverished Black neighborhoods and meetings with Black cultural organizations. It soon became clear to Green that the exhibition organizers had assumed that, because she was a Black artist, her work would address racial issues in the city. As Kwon explains, “the matchmaking mediation of the sponsoring institution, inevitably motivated by the presumption of an artist’s interests and the anticipation of a particular kind of collaborative project, often reduces, sometimes stereotypes, the identities of the artist *and* the community group.” (Kwon, *One Place after Another*, 141).

collaboration to self-fashioning, from a decentering of the artist as cultural authority to a remaking of the other in neo-primitivist guise.”<sup>11</sup>

It is no coincidence that community-based public art flourished in the 1990s as neoliberalism came to dominate economic and social policy. As Grant Kester has argued, community-based public art displaced the social responsibility of the state onto artists and individuals, suggesting that community members need only experience the healing power of art to pull themselves up by the bootstraps and overcome poverty and inequality. In particular, Kester criticizes the tradition of public art wherein “the artist uses the experience of art making to enhance the self-esteem of the poor or working class, whose poverty or dispossession is seen as the consequence of individual moral failing rather than any systematic form of oppression.”<sup>12</sup> As Kester explains, this approach has the effect of shifting the blame away from governmental policy onto individuals, “Here art is pressed into service as part of a more general attempt to dismantle the state’s regulatory oversight of the market system. Problems of poverty or inequality will thus be addressed through an informational mechanism of private philanthropy and individual redemption rather than openly acknowledged as a systematic effect of the market system that the state has an obligation to relieve.”<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Foster, “The Artist as Ethnographer,” 196.

<sup>12</sup> Kester, *Conversation Pieces*, xvi.

<sup>13</sup> Kester, xvi.



Figure 3.2. Thomas Hirschhorn, *Gramsci Monument*, 2013, Forest Houses, Bronx, New York.

This murkiness between social work and artwork is especially pointed in projects such as Thomas Hirschhorn's *Gramsci Monument* (2013), a complex of temporary pavilions erected in the Forest Houses projects in the South Bronx area of New York [Figure 3.2]. The pavilions included many useful amenities for residents, including a library, free internet, a workshop area, and a bar. Staffed by locals, the project also provided gainful employment opportunities for residents. While the work met some of the needs of residents, these benefits were short lived, as the summer-long project lasted only for two months, the typical duration of an exhibition. A former resident of the housing project, artist Glenn Ligon has questioned Hirschhorn's claim that, as an artist, he was not responsible for the long-term support of the neighborhood, "Hirschhorn is very clear that the Gramsci Monument is art, not social work, and he resists the idea that he has an ongoing responsibility for what happens in the neighborhood after the Monument's departure."<sup>14</sup> Hirschhorn is probably right that the burden for addressing the ills of poverty and inequality should not rest on his shoulders, but given the reality of the hollowed out social welfare system, one is left to question, as Ligon does, "What if instead of building the *Gramsci Monument*, Hirschhorn had proposed building the Gramsci Charter School?"<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Glenn Ligon, "Thomas Is a Trip," *Artforum International* 52, no. 3 (November 2013): 232.

<sup>15</sup> Ligon, 232.

While the debates surrounding public art raise important questions about the role of the artist and art's responsibility to its public, they also point to a more fundamental problem: What constitutes a public? What assumptions underlie its seeming coherence? And how might art respond to the messy constellation of associations that make and remake communities?

Pierre Huyghe has made several works that engage with local communities, most notably the 2003 project *Streamside Day*, a festival orchestrated for a small suburban community along the Hudson River in upstate New York.<sup>16</sup> Superficially, Huyghe's gesture shares many qualities with conventional community-based public art projects. The artist visited a community and spent time working with its residents to arrange a participatory celebration and also created a plan for a community center. However, rather than a strictly documentarian look at the reality of the community, Huyghe projected his own fiction onto the community—a constellation of marketing buzzwords, Disney films, 19<sup>th</sup>-century landscape painting, Manifest Destiny, postwar planning, suburban realism, and eco-conscious consumerism. In the process, Huyghe investigates the ways in which these myths mediate and organize collective experience, revealing how a community continually reconstitutes itself in relation to a set of shared fantasies—ranging from otherworldly to the utterly banal.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Other projects include *La Toison d'or* (1993), an event staged in a playground in Dijon; *Rue Longvic/Chantier Barbès-Rochechouart* (1994), a public billboard project; *Festival du film de famille* (1994), a film festival created from the home movies of a local town; *Extended Holidays* (1996), an invitation to a group of students to vacation where the artist spends his holidays, and *Block Party* (2002), a party organized with Hip Hop artists in the Bronx neighborhood of New York.

<sup>17</sup> Huyghe's interest in myth has roots in 20<sup>th</sup>-century critical theory, drawing especially on Roland Barthes' assertion that, myth "transforms history into nature." (Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers [New York: Noonday Press, 1991], 128). That is, myth has an ideological function, making that which is mediated (determined by history and culture) appear to be natural, "Myth is an historical reality, defined, even if this goes back quite a while, by the way in which men have produced or used it; and what myth gives in return is a natural image of this reality...Myth is constituted by the loss of the historical quality of things: in it,

The first part of this chapter considers Pierre Huyghe's early practice, looking specifically at the Association of Freed Time, a project which lays the groundwork for the artist's sustained investigation of forms of leisure and entertainment. Through the Association, Huyghe begins to break away from the temporal structure of the exhibition, establishing modes of collectivity that extended beyond the frame of the museum. Here, Huyghe confidently adopts a compromised position, resolving to work within the structures of the experience economy, "offering services—in full awareness that it all plays into the hands of the new politics of flexibility."<sup>18</sup> As I discuss below, this position is in part necessitated by the recent evolution of museums into experiential sites and the accompanying expectation that artists provide immersive and participatory encounters for audiences and community partners.<sup>19</sup>

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*Leisure time is constructed on working rhythms. It is an economic necessity, a compulsory flexibility. Culture forms part of leisure. It is a new destination that tour operators place on their list of products. The flâneur's unproductive strolling and his idle gaze have been submitted to the pace of the production line...the flâneur is a client in commercial mall, an image in which he figures.*<sup>20</sup>

In 1995, Pierre Huyghe was invited to participate in the group exhibition *Moral Maze*, curated by his colleagues and frequent collaborators Liam Gillick and Philippe Parreno at Le Consortium, Dijon. In response to the invitation Huyghe founded *L'Association des Temps*

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things lose the memory that they once were made." (Barthes, 142). In Huyghe's work, myths are often amplified to the point of absurdity, emphasizing their artifice.

<sup>18</sup> Pierre Huyghe and Jérôme Sans, "Recasting the Roles: Pierre Huyghe Interviewed by Jérôme Sans," in *Secession: Pierre Huyghe* (Vienna: Secession, 1999), n.p.

<sup>19</sup> Immersive encounters are now prevalent in popular culture at large, see for example Instagram-friendly experiences such as Yayoi Kusama's infinity rooms, Hannes Koch and Florian Ortkrass' *Rain Room*, the Van Gogh Immersive Experience, and the WNDR Museum.

<sup>20</sup> Huyghe and Sans, "Recasting the Roles: Pierre Huyghe Interviewed by Jérôme Sans."

*Libérés* (The Association of Freed Time), an organization structured around “the development of unproductive time.”<sup>21</sup> The association was legally registered with the French government and announced in the June 1995 issue of the *Journal Officiel de la république française* [Figure 3.3]. The declaration described the objectives of the Association as such: “for the development of unproductive time, to reflect on free time, and the development of a society without work, to make these ideas known, the association will organize different public meetings, conferences, publications, and celebrations.”<sup>22</sup>

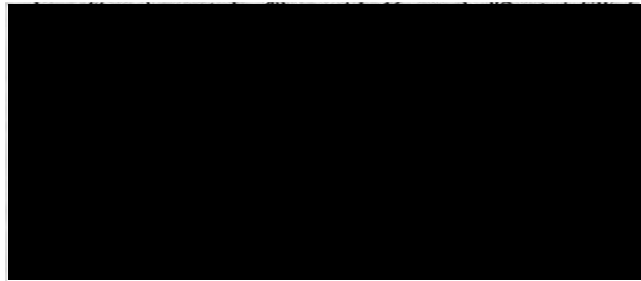


Figure 3.3. Pierre Huyghe, *Announcement of the Association of Freed Time in the Journal Officiel de la république française*, July 5, 1995.

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<sup>21</sup> Although “freed time” is generally accepted as the English translation of the title, the original French phrasing *L’Association des Temps Libérés* has a more revolutionary connotation, suggesting that time must be liberated or wrested from circuits of production and exchange. For a discussion of the significance of the French, see Lauren Rotenberg, “The Prospects of ‘Freed’ Time: Pierre Huyghe and L’association Des Temps Libérés,” *Public Art Dialogue* 3, no. 2 (2013): 186.

<sup>22</sup> Huyghe’s project has roots in the Situationist critique of commodified leisure time. In some respects, the Association’s embrace of “unproductive time” would seem to heed Guy Debord’s call for “the withering away of the social measurement of time in favour of a federation of independent times—a federation of playful individual and collective forms of irreversible time that are simultaneously present.” (Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, 92). However, working at a considerable distance from the nascent moment described by Debord, Huyghe is much more skeptical about whether or not this kind of independence is at all possible, the artist explains, “We must dispel one received idea and that is that the spectacle is a fatalism, inherently alienating. The spectacle is a format, it is a way to do things...Spectacle has always been linked with illusion, with manipulation, with the culture industry. It is though a format and a way of doing things that can be taken and appropriated, and used for other purposes.” (Baker and Huyghe, “An Interview with Pierre Huyghe,” 104).

The first general meeting of the Association took place during the exhibition opening for *Moral Maze* and included all of the artists involved in the show: Angela Bulloch, Maurizio Cattelan, Liam Gillick, Carsten Höller, Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster, Douglas Gordon, Jorge Pardo, Philippe Parreno, Rikrit Tiravanija, and Xavier Veilhan. Dedicated to unproductive time, the tasks of the group were necessarily ill-defined. Nevertheless, the artists conceived several projects linked to the Association of Freed Time, including an itinerant school (*Temporary School*, 1996), a guerilla television station (*Mobile TV*, 1995), a plan to purchase an unfinished home (*The House or Home?*, 1995), and a film studio (*Anna Sanders Films*, 1997). The meetings of the Association of Freed Time took place outside of the purview of museum audiences and continued beyond the short run of the exhibition. As Huyghe explains, he created the Association “to turn the exhibition not into the end goal for various artists’ works, a simple place for the exhibition of products, but to turn the time of the exhibition into a departure point for other projects, other scenarios. It was a way to extend the time of the exhibition to other projects of indeterminate length.”<sup>23</sup> In this way, the activities of the Association challenged the special event ethos of the exhibition platform, displacing the time of the exhibition into other spheres of activity. These activities remained, to a certain extent, ambivalent or disinterested in the public audience they might address. By exploiting a particular facet of group shows, namely that they bring together artists, the Association provided a way to maintain connections and collaborations among a group of artists with shared sensibilities and concerns. Thus, the project functioned as a kind of “non-experience,” its contours, duration, and function remained uncertain, even as the Association managed to share real knowledge and produce collaborative artworks.

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<sup>23</sup> Baker and Huyghe, “An Interview with Pierre Huyghe,” 88.

Throughout the 1990s the Association developed a number of projects that questioned the shifting dimensions of work and leisure in postindustrial society. This included *Le Procès du temps libre* (1999) [Figure 3.4], a collaboration between Pierre Huyghe and Phillippe Parreno, in which the artists put the notions of work, rest, and leisure “on trial.”<sup>24</sup> Entering a series of clues into evidence, the artists interrogated an expansive notion of free time, touching upon references to protests, holidays, video games, boredom, and laziness. For the first clue, the artists submitted a postcard with the word “Boycott” printed on it; the back of the card described the origin of the word, which dates back to Charles Boycott, a 19<sup>th</sup>-century land agent whose attempt to evict tenants spurred an organized work stoppage.<sup>25</sup> The postcard also announced the creation of a “Boycott Party,” a new public holiday celebrating, the artists described, “the object of the first protest based on a refusal to participate.”<sup>26</sup> Also alluding to the commercialization of holidays, the artist suggested that “merchandising and rituals should be invented.”<sup>27</sup> In another clue, the words “The right to laziness, 1880” were written on the gallery wall, a reference to Paul Lafargue’s manifesto *Le Droit à la Paresse* (The Right to be Lazy), which urged the French working class to “proclaim the Rights of Laziness, a thousand times more noble and more sacred than the anaemic [*sic*] Rights of Man concocted by the metaphysical lawyers of the bourgeois revolution.”<sup>28</sup> Lafargue suggested that the proletariat might use laziness as weapon to fight

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<sup>24</sup> It is important to note that the title of the work refers to *temps libre* (free time) whereas the Association was dedicated to *temps libérés* (liberated time). As Huyghe describes, “Whereas free time is time which is subjugated to working time, ‘liberated time’ would aim to extend various practices to unrestricted durations and more specific types of reception” (Huyghe, Gillick, and Parreno, *Pierre Huyghe*, 179).

<sup>25</sup> For more on Charles Boycott see Joyce Marlow, *Captain Boycott and the Irish* (London: Saturday Review Press, 1973).

<sup>26</sup> Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, ed., *Pierre Huyghe (Skira)* (Milan: Skira, 2004), 188.

<sup>27</sup> Christov-Bakargiev, 188.

<sup>28</sup> Paul Lafargue, *The Right to Be Lazy (Le Droit à La Paresse)* (Chicago: C. H. Kerr, 1907), 29.

against the working rhythms imposed by the bourgeois, “It must accustom itself to working but three hours a day, reserving the rest of the day and night for leisure and feasting.”<sup>29</sup> Lafargue, the son-in-law of Karl Marx, rejected the communist glorification of work, arguing that the proletariat had bought too much into the capitalist myth of labor, so that rather than demanding their fair share of accumulated wealth, they ask simply for the right to work. Lafargue shifted emphasis away from the means of production to the means of consumption, suggesting, for example, that workers might be given unlimited lines of credit. This would allow the proletariat to consume in excess, matching the logic of accumulation at the heart of industrialized production.

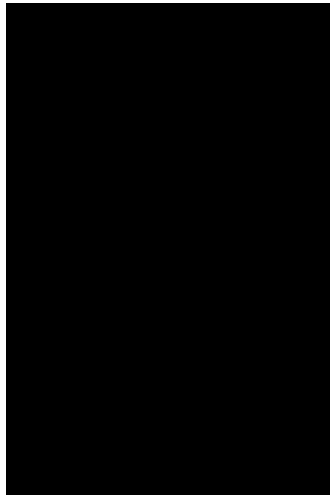


Figure 3.4. Phillippe Parreno and Pierre Huyghe, *Le Procès du temps libre*, 1999, poster, postcard, book, and plant.

Below Lafargue’s words, Huyghe and Parreno presented a found poster from 1970 depicting a nude woman lying in a field of daisies, a visual nod to hippie counterculture and the revolutionary aspirations embodied by the May ’68 slogan “ne travaillez jamais.” The artists also included a facsimile of Marcel Broodthaers’ *Fig. 1 Programme*, which appeared alongside a

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<sup>29</sup> Lafargue, 29.

potted palm tree. Broodthaers incorporated palm trees into a number of his works, foregrounding the mechanisms of colonial conquest that allowed for the domestication of this exotic plant in Europe's indoor winter gardens.<sup>30</sup> For the final clue, the artists painted the gallery walls with a diagram of movements related to the video game Pong, a video game that blurred the boundaries between work and leisure by mirroring the repetitive movements of office workers seated in front of computer screens. Through a series of interwoven clues, *Le Procès du temps libre* traces a profound shift in our relation to work and leisure: from the peasant revolt against Charles Boycott's landlord feudalism; Lafarge's critique of industrial labor; and the aspirations of May '68; through to the information age, where immaterial labor resembles the task-like permutations of video games. These various registers of work and leisure also underlie Huyghe's practice, challenging a simple alignment of his work with emancipatory engagement.

The artists in the *Moral Maze* would also appear in Nicolas Bourriaud's landmark exhibition *Traffic* held the following year at CAPC musée d'art contemporain, Bordeaux. While Bourriaud would describe the work in *Traffic* as "a reversal in the relationships between work and leisure,"<sup>31</sup> the *Moral Maze* shows that the same roster of artists had already begun to critique this concept, most notably as participants in Huyghe's Association. Unfortunately, the context of relational aesthetics has continued to shape critical accounts of Huyghe's work, echoed for example, Lauren Rotenberg's assertion that "The Association is an example of a utopian project...that constructs an alternative time, rather than space, wherein the artists model 'a

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<sup>30</sup> Broodthaers used potted palm trees in a number of works, often highlighting the absurd coincidence of exoticism and banality at the heart of the 19th-century museum's origin. As Rachel Haidu observes, "The palms are the most prosaic, stalwart, and domestic species of once-tropical flora imported from exotic places...In Broodthaers's hands, the museum becomes a kind of design counterpart to the doctor's waiting room." (Rachel Haidu, *The Absence of Work: Marcel Broodthaers, 1964-1976* [MIT Press, 2010], 250–51).

<sup>31</sup> Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, 70.

society without work’.”<sup>32</sup> It is precisely this kind of utopian portrayal of leisure that the Association intended to complicate. As Huyghe explains, “The critical position today would be to consider oneself as taking part in this culture of leisure and to work on that basis, rendering oneself available, destroying the linearity of time, offering services—in full awareness that it all plays into the hands of the new politics of flexibility.”<sup>33</sup> Crucially, postindustrial labor has absorbed many of the qualities typically associated with leisure, embracing creativity, experimentation, and play in service of a hyper-flexible “just-in-time” ethos.<sup>34</sup> Under these conditions, simply transforming the exhibition into a site for leisure activities does little to disrupt the protocols of postindustrial work.

As the sphere of work has embraced the principles of creativity, participation, and collaboration, contemporary art museums have similarly placed greater emphasis on the participatory engagement of audiences, refashioning themselves as experiential sites.<sup>35</sup> These

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<sup>32</sup> Rotenberg, “The Prospects of ‘Freed’ Time,” 189.

<sup>33</sup> Huyghe and Sans, “Recasting the Roles: Pierre Huyghe Interviewed by Jérôme Sans.”

<sup>34</sup> This transformation of postindustrial labor is the subject of Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello’s *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, for a detailed discussion of this work, see Chapter 1 of this volume.

<sup>35</sup> For example, Andreas Huyssen has argued, “The new museum and exhibition practices correspond to changing audience expectations. Spectators in ever larger numbers seem to be looking for emphatic experiences, instant illuminations, stellar events, and blockbuster shows rather than serious and meticulous appropriation of cultural knowledge” (Andreas Huyssen, “Escape from Amnesia: The Museum as Mass Medium,” in *Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia* [New York: Routledge, 1995], 14). And, citing Pine and Gilmore, Dorothea von Hantelmann asserts that after 1960, artistic practice takes an “experiential turn” that “corresponds to a general revaluation of experience in Western societies, in which ‘experience’ has become a focus of social, economic, and cultural activity” (Dorothea von Hantelmann, “The Experiential Turn,” *On Performativity*, Living Collections Catalogue, 1 [June 30, 2014], <http://walkerart.org/collections/publications/performativity/experiential-turn>). In an article titled “After the White Cube,” Hal Foster adopts a more critical view of the recent turn to experiences, describing, “Perhaps these new and renovated museums have a programme after all, a mega-programme so obvious that it goes unstated: entertainment. We still live in a spectacle society – our reliance on information hasn’t altered our investment in images – or, to use the anodyne phrase, we live in an ‘experience economy’. What relation do modern and

transformations were observed by Rosalind Krauss in her 1990 essay “The Cultural Logic of the Late Capitalist Museum.” Krauss describes the ways in which the architectural container of the museum transformed into an experience in its own right—one that competed with the very art it hoped to display. Krauss recounts her impression upon viewing an exhibition of Minimalist art from the Panza collection at the Musée d’Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, “This experience, then, [is] not in front of what could be called the art, but in the midst of an oddly emptied yet grandiloquent space of which the museum itself—as a building—is somehow the object. Within this experience, it is the museum that emerges as powerful presence and yet as properly empty, the museum as a space from which the collection has withdrawn.”<sup>36</sup> For Krauss, the interrogation of space inaugurated by Minimalist art fundamentally transformed viewers’ relationship with contemporary museums, she writes, “Minimalism...has reshaped the way we, as late twentieth-

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contemporary art museums have to a culture that so prizes the entertainment experience?...Spectacle is here to stay, at least as long as capitalism is, and museums are part of it; that’s a given, but for that very reason it shouldn’t be a goal.” (Hal Foster, “After the White Cube,” *London Review of Books*, March 19, 2015, <https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v37/n06/hal-foster/after-the-white-cube>). Claire Bishop notes, “Venues such as the Baltic in Gateshead, the Kunstverein Munich, and the Palais de Tokyo have used metaphors like ‘laboratory’, ‘construction site’, and ‘art factory’ to differentiate themselves from bureaucracy-encumbered collection-based museums; their dedicated project spaces create a buzz of creativity and the aura of being at the vanguard of contemporary production. One could argue that in this context, project-based works-in-progress and artists-in-residence begin to dovetail with an ‘experience economy’, the marketing strategy that seeks to replace goods and services with scripted and staged personal experiences” (Bishop, “Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics,” 52). The artist Martha Rosler has written a series of essays about art and the experience economy, noting, “In the experience economy, a primary mission of museums has become the promise not of cultivation and contemplation but rather edification and amazement, for visitors from toddlers to the elderly and for people of every social class. The experience economy demands authenticity, which axiomatically takes shape as heightened faux emotion. Like public relations happytalk, museums and galleries are publicly thrilled, excited, and delighted” (Martha Rosler, “Why Are People Being So Nice?,” *E-Flux*, no. 77 [November 2016], <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/77/76185/why-are-people-being-so-nice/>).

<sup>36</sup> Rosalind Krauss, “The Cultural Logic of the Late Capitalist Museum,” *October* 54 (Autumn 1990): 4.

century viewers, look at art: the demands we now put on it; our need to have a cumulative, serial, crescendo towards the intensity of this experience; our need to have more and at a larger scale.”<sup>37</sup> Krauss points to MASS MoCA as emblematic of this trend. Director Thomas Krens envisioned the site as new kind of museum that “would forego history in the name of a kind of intensity of experience, an aesthetic charge that is not so much temporal (historical) as it is now radically spatial.”<sup>38</sup> Krauss finds the emphasis on the ‘intensity of experience’ troubling—if Minimalism had hoped to return the fragmented, instrumentalized, rationalized subject to lived bodily experience, the late capitalist museum distorted this dream, immersing the subject within a “dizzying effort to decode signs that emerge from a no longer mappable or knowable depth.”<sup>39</sup> Here, Krauss likens the disembodied experience of museums to the inscrutable infrastructures of information technology or capital transfer—those dematerialized spheres that Frederic Jameson dubbed “hyperspace.”<sup>40</sup>

Jameson introduced the term “hyperspace” to describe the disorienting delirium resulting from the encounter with an endless array of experiences. Per Jameson, this intensity is exacerbated by the fact that spaces have absorbed more and more functions, hyperspace “aspires to being a total space, a complete world, a kind of miniature city...it does not wish to be a part of the city but rather its equivalent and replacement or substitute.”<sup>41</sup> Hyperspace demands constant movement, a kind of disarticulated roaming, within which it is difficult to find one’s bearings. Today’s museums have acquired many more functions—it now seems hard to imagine a museum

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<sup>37</sup> Krauss, 7.

<sup>38</sup> Krauss, 7.

<sup>39</sup> Krauss, 12.

<sup>40</sup> For a discussion of hyperspace see Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, Or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991).

<sup>41</sup> Jameson, 40.

that does not also offer a selection of amenities including gourmet restaurants, coffee shops, design stores, cinemas, free wi-fi, education centers, and for-rent banquet halls.<sup>42</sup> In this respect, the museum becomes a general space of leisure and entertainment, a place for visitors to lounge and soak up the atmosphere, irrespective of whether they enter the actual galleries and view the art.<sup>43</sup> For Krauss, the museum is “a space that supports an experience that Jameson calls ‘the hysterical sublime’. Which is to say that precisely in relation to the suppression of the older subjectivity—in what could be called the waning of affect—there is ‘a strange compensatory decorative exhilaration’. In place of the older emotions there is now an experience that must properly be termed an ‘intensity’—a free-floating and impersonal feeling dominated by a peculiar kind of euphoria.”<sup>44</sup>

Since Krauss’ 1990 critique, this effect has become even more widespread as museum administrators and curators have foregrounded experience, participation, and immersion, often as an extension of efforts to make museums more open and accessible to audiences. Discussing the 40,000-square-foot expansion plan for the Museum of Modern Art, New York, Director Glenn Lowry describes, “the museum is a laboratory in which the public is invited to participate in the

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<sup>42</sup> These functions were integral to Nicolas Bourriaud’s vision for the Palais de Tokyo: “For me, the restaurant and the bookshop are an important part of the project. Super important. We are trying to develop very interactive situations, between the boutiques and café and the activities of the space of the art center...It’s important to provide visitors with books, objects, games,—whatever—as kind of a sweet preceding the medicine.” (Nicolas Bourriaud, interview by Karen Moss, October 18, 2002,

[https://www.stretcher.org/features/nicolas\\_bourriaud\\_and\\_karen\\_moss/](https://www.stretcher.org/features/nicolas_bourriaud_and_karen_moss/)).

<sup>43</sup> The Walker Art Center’s 2000 exhibition *Let’s Entertain* marks an early attempt to come to terms with this phenomenon. In a conversation that takes place in the RainForest Café at the Mall of America in Minnesota, the curators ask, “What kind of lessons on being “customer-savvy” and providing a pleasurable experience can museums learn from Disney or Mall of America? Where does the museum fit in this larger cultural and experiential system?” (Philippe Vergne, ed., *Let’s Entertain Life’s Guilty Pleasures* [Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 2000], 23). The show included Pierre Huyghe’s video *Blanche-Niege Lucie* (1997).

<sup>44</sup> Krauss, “The Cultural Logic of the Late Capitalist Museum,” 12.

experiments.”<sup>45</sup> Likewise, Nicholas Serota, who oversaw the building of the Tate Modern, shared his aspiration to activate the museum experience for audiences: “Our aim must be to generate a condition in which visitors can experience a sense of discovery in looking at particular paintings, sculptures or installations in a particular room at a particular moment, rather than find themselves standing on the conveyor belt of history.”<sup>46</sup> Subsequently, when the Tate Modern launched the Tanks, a new underground space dedicated to live art, curator Catherine Wood explained:

Conventionally, one’s encounter would be very much about looking: at painting or sculpture. This changed during the 1960s towards a more physical relationship to art objects and an emphasis on ‘space’. But in much contemporary art we experience the work not only through space and time, but through an awareness of the encounter having a social dimension, often a sense of reciprocity, even, via the act of participation. So it’s not only the nature of the Tanks’ architectural spaces that is different...the programme places an emphasis on the audience’s physical presence and attention.<sup>47</sup>

In the same discussion, curator Stuart Comer echoed Wood’s sentiment, asking, “How can you create an experience of history that’s not a passive one, that’s not about putting something in a vitrine as a trophy, but a history that can actually be experienced socially and live?”<sup>48</sup> Curator

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<sup>45</sup> Andrew Goldstein, “Can MoMA’s Expansion Ever Really Be Finished? Glenn Lowry on Where the Museum May—or May Not—Go From Here,” *Artnet News*, October 16, 2019, sec. The Big Interview, <https://news.artnet.com/the-big-interview/glenn-lowry-moma-reopening-interview-part-2-1678819>. The move toward participation has increased the visibility of time-based media in museums, as Sabine Breitwieser, MoMA’s chief curator of media and performance art, explains, “The introduction of performance and participative formats in the museum has coincided with a shift from its original conception as a place in which to store, conserve and mediate information about cultural artefacts, towards an audience-oriented approach, in which the museum becomes a service provider within a feel-good, event-oriented culture” (Sabine Breitwieser, “Taking Part in the Museum,” *Afterall: A Journal of Art, Context and Enquiry* 34 [September 1, 2013]: 9).

<sup>46</sup> Nicholas Serota, *Experience Or Interpretation: The Dilemma of Museums of Modern Art* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1997), 55.

<sup>47</sup> Stuart Comer et al., “Tate’s Curators Reveal Their Vision for The Tanks: The Tanks at Tate Modern,” *Tate*, no. 25 (Summer 2012), <https://www.tate.org.uk/tate-etc/issue-25-summer-2012/tates-curators-reveal-their-vision-tanks>.

<sup>48</sup> Comer et al.

Chrissie Iles expressed a similar view in an interview about her exhibition *Dreamlands: Immersive Cinema and Art, 1905-2016*, which went on view shortly after the opening of the Whitney Museum's new building: "It has been interesting to observe the evolution of the museum into a shared collective space that the public are increasingly enthusiastic about visiting. I think the public are so saturated with information that there is a desire for a collective experience in real time, in places where physical, material objects can be seen, and ideas exchanged. Technology can only facilitate communication remotely, via a screen. Museums offer a space to share experiences in a very tangible way."<sup>49</sup> As the shifting focus of museums has facilitated a building boom, it has also transformed the kinds of works that museums display, centering works that foreground live performance, immersive video, and social interaction.

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The development of museums as experiential sites coincides with the wider transition to the so-called experience economy.<sup>50</sup> In a now famous 1998 article published in the *Harvard Business Review*, B. Joseph Pine and James H. Gilmore's coined the term "experience economy" to describe a novel economic offering, distinguishable from raw goods, consumer products, or customer services. As Pine and Gilmore describe, "An experience occurs when a company

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<sup>49</sup> Antonia Marsh and Chrissie Iles, "How Can the Art World Become More Accessible?," *HERO Magazine*, October 24, 2018, <https://hero-magazine.com/article/135348/antonia-marsh-in-conversation-with-whitney-museums-chrissie-iles/>.

<sup>50</sup> On museums and the experience economy, see Naomi Rea, "As Museums Fall in Love With 'Experiences,' Their Core Missions Face Redefinition," *Artnet News*, March 14, 2019, sec. Art World, <https://news.artnet.com/art-world/experience-economy-museums-1486807>; Scott Reyburn, "Snap and Go: The Pros and Cons of the Art Experience Economy," *The Art Newspaper*, December 2, 2019, <http://www.theartnewspaper.com/analysis/snap-and-go-the-art-experience-economy>.

intentionally uses services as the stage, and goods as props, to engage individual customers in a way that creates a memorable event.”<sup>51</sup> Highlighting the resolutely theatrical dimension of consumer experiences, the pair argue that businesses use storytelling to package goods and services into a cohesive narrative event, making their brand more desirable and more memorable for consumers. Focusing particularly on the individual, Pine and Gilmore emphasize personalization and customization, “Experiences are inherently personal, existing only in the mind of an individual who has been engaged on an emotional, physical, intellectual, or even spiritual level...each experience derives from the interaction between the staged event (like a theatrical play) and the individual’s state of mind.”<sup>52</sup> As Pine and Gilmore describe, “successful” experiences invite active customer participation and facilitate an immersive connection to the event. The authors identify five key strategies for realizing experiences:

- Theme the experience.
- Harmonize impressions with positive cues.
- Eliminate negative cues.
- Mix in memorabilia.
- Engage all five senses.

While often immaterial, successful experiences provide ample opportunities for consumption, often in the form of souvenirs that memorialize the encounter. Amusement parks like Disneyland, dubbed by Pine and Gilmore as an “experience-economy pioneer,” epitomize this approach.<sup>53</sup> Theme restaurants such as Planet Hollywood and the Rain Forest Café, popular in the 1990s, also embody this model—establishments that use gimmicks like celebrity cameos or

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<sup>51</sup> Gilmore and Pine, “Welcome to the Experience Economy,” 98.

<sup>52</sup> Gilmore and Pine, 99.

<sup>53</sup> Gilmore and Pine, 99.

elaborate scenery to entertain guests who visit not so much for the food but for the experience. Often, the experience in question draws on sentimentality for the past, calling on consumers to re-experience what has come before. Indeed, Pine and Gilmore identify nostalgia as an essential component of crafting authentic experiences:

Paying tribute to past people, times, and events makes present events and times—and the businesses that offer them—come off as more real...Creating that feeling of nostalgia can appeal to referential authenticity across the entire progression of economic offerings. Heirloom produce, rotary dial phones, full-service gas stations, Renaissance festivals, ballroom dancing—all evoke a past that customers usually perceive as real compared with more modern offerings.<sup>54</sup>

In American consumer life, there is perhaps no period that appears with greater nostalgic force than the 1950s—an era that shapes the themes of a number of experience economy franchises—Hard Rock Café, Planet Hollywood, Johnny Rockets, and the like. It bears remarking that the spaces that Pine and Gilmore identify with the experience economy—themed amusement parks and immersive retail centers—reflect the postmodern principles promoted by Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown, and Steven Izenour in their treatise *Learning from Las Vegas*. Describing the pastiche of tradition and cliché on the Vegas strip, the authors advocate for “learning from the existing landscape” and urge architects to “look backward at history and tradition.”<sup>55</sup> Calling for a postmodern architecture built on the past, the group foregrounds the importance of allusion, symbolism, and narrative:

The value of symbolism and allusion in an architecture of vast space and speed and proves that people, even architects, have fun with architecture that reminds them of something else, perhaps harems or the Wild West in Las Vegas, perhaps of the nation’s New England forebears in New Jersey. Allusion and comment, on the past or present or on our great commonplaces or old clichés, and inclusion of the everyday in the

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<sup>54</sup> James H. Gilmore and B. Joseph Pine, *Authenticity What Consumers Really Want* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Business Review Press, 2007), 70–71.

<sup>55</sup> Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown, and Steven Izenour, *Learning from Las Vegas: The Forgotten Symbolism of Architectural Form* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1972), 3.

environment, sacred and profane—these are what are lacking in present-day Modern architecture.<sup>56</sup>

*Learning from Las Vegas* describes postmodernism in decidedly populist terms, positioning architecture's embrace of popular commercial culture as a rebuke to the perceived elitism of modernist orthodoxy. However, Venturi and Scott Brown's for-the-people populism also had a normalizing effect, a sentiment which surfaces most forcefully in the authors' suggestion that "to find our symbolism we must go to the suburban edges of the existing city that are symbolically rather than formalistically attractive and represent the aspirations of almost all, including most ghetto dwellers and most of the silent white majority."<sup>57</sup> As Reinhold Martin has argued, Venturi and Scott Brown's appeal to the silent white majority effectively generalized the values of white middle-class suburbia to culture as a whole:

The force and the menace of the term 'majority', used in a cultural sense, lay as much in the implicit a priori division of the population into quanta, and the identification of the aesthetic preferences of a particular quantum (white, suburban, etc.) as 'normal', as it did in the implication that the signs and symbols of the predominantly white, middle-class suburb captured in some ideological way and through aesthetic mediation the values of the general population.<sup>58</sup>

If we return to the experience economy outlined by Pine and Gilmore, we might ask how these same values, articulated as nostalgia and authenticity, assume a specifically suburban American audience.

Nostalgia for a past that likely never was is a quintessentially postmodern condition. In *Postmodernism, Or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Frederic Jameson argues that the idea of "the fifties" is itself a form of fiction, a unified concept of the past that never existed.

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<sup>56</sup> Venturi, Scott Brown, and Izenour, 53.

<sup>57</sup> Venturi, Scott Brown, and Izenour, 107.

<sup>58</sup> Reinhold Martin, *Utopia's Ghost: Architecture and Postmodernism, Again* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 6.

Jameson points to Philip K. Dick's novel *Time Out of Joint* as an example of how the past is constructed as fiction. The novel centers on man who lives in a quiet American suburb in the year 1959, a quintessential small-town USA. While seeming to detail the realism of the fifties era, Dick's novel includes a twist that transform the book into a piece of science fiction—the central character slowly discovers that he is actually living in 1997, in the midst of an atomic war. The peaceful 1950s suburban village is a facsimile, constructed to shield him from this reality. Moreover, Dick shows that the protagonist willfully accepted this delusion as a form of infantile regression, fleeing to the comforts of his childhood memories. Written in 1959, Dick's novel is a powerful metaphor for the contemporary experience of historicity in the postmodern age, chronicling the ways in which the past becomes a reified fiction to which we attach feelings of nostalgia. As Jameson explains, “what is at stake is essentially a process of reification whereby we draw back from our immersion in the here and now (not yet identified as a ‘present’) and grasp it as a kind of thing— not merely a ‘present’ but a present that can be dated and called the eighties or the fifties.”<sup>59</sup> And as Dick's novel lays bare the formation of the present as a fiction, it also suggests the possibility for transformation, Jameson writes:

Reification is here indeed built into the novel itself and, as it were, defused and recuperated as a form of praxis: the fifties is a thing, but a thing that we can build, just as the science fiction writer builds his own small-scale model. At that point, then, reification ceases to be a baleful and alienating process, a noxious side-effect of our mode of production, if not, indeed, its fundamental dynamic, and is rather transferred to the side of human energies and human possibilities.<sup>60</sup>

The genre of fiction can be a powerful tool, muddying and supplanting our reified notion of the present. As I describe below, Pierre Huyghe's work engages with suburban nostalgia, using the genre of fiction to shuffle between our reified idea of the past and the uncertain possibility of its

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<sup>59</sup> Jameson, *Postmodernism, Or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, 284.

<sup>60</sup> Jameson, 285.

transformation. Here, I argue that nostalgia provides a fictional framework for organizing our attachments to the past. Theorist Kathleen Stewart identifies nostalgia as an acutely postmodern phenomenon, an attempt to construct an unified past in reaction to the seeming dislocation and fragmentation of the late capitalist present, “Threatened with a deadening pluralism that makes us all just an ‘other’ among others, in which difference erases into an utter indifference, and where the self is a pastiche of styles glued to a surface, nostalgia becomes the very lighthouse waving us back to shore—the one point on the landscape that gives hope of direction.”<sup>61</sup> If modernism oriented itself toward a future yet to come, nostalgia projects its utopian vision onto a past that never was, precisely where Huyghe locates *Streamside Day*.

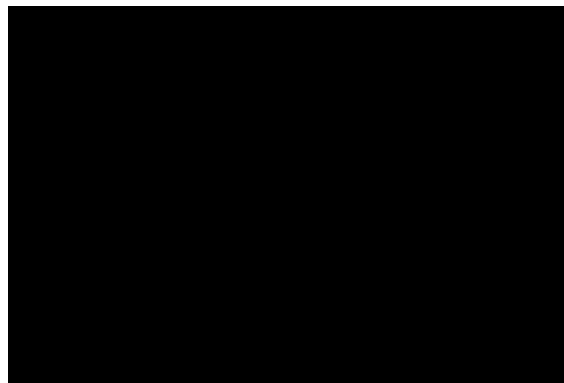


Figure 3.5. Pierre Huyghe, *Streamside Day*, 2003, film still.

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<sup>61</sup> Kathleen Stewart, “Nostalgia--A Polemic,” *Cultural Anthropology* 3, no. 3 (1988): 229. Stewart’s essay references a town with striking similarities to Streamside, “On the tip of Long Island’s North Shore, a town called Orient has recently become a ‘new land’ for ‘yuppies’ from the city. They have built country dream houses in the nostalgic image of a remembered feeling of childhood. A picturesque square overlooking the bay has been pieced together with a collection of 18th- and 19th-century schoolhouses, inns, and white steepled churches that have been moved to the location from nearby sites or from their primitivist origin—New England itself” (Stewart, 232). Likewise, Svetlana Boym argues that nostalgia defines the 21<sup>st</sup> century, “By the twenty-first century, the passing ailment turned into the incurable modern condition. The twentieth century began with a futuristic utopia and ended with nostalgia. Optimistic belief in the future was discarded like an outmoded spaceship sometime in the 1960s. Nostalgia itself has a utopian dimension, only it is no longer directed toward the future. Sometimes nostalgia is not directed toward the past either, but rather sideways. The nostalgic feels stifled within the conventional confines of time and space.” (Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* [New York: Basic Books, 2008], xiv).

## *Streamside Day*

In 2003, Pierre Huyghe created *Streamside Day*, a choreographed celebration for a small suburban community. The project consists of several parts, a live festival organized for the community [Figure 3.5]; a film that blends documentary footage of the event with a fictionalized narrative; a plan for a community center; and a kinetic gallery installation. The work began in 2002, when curator Lynne Cooke invited Huyghe to exhibit at the Dia Art Foundation. At the time, Huyghe was well aware of Dia's reputation as an early supporter of Land art—the foundation was responsible for commissioning and maintaining a number of projects located in remote areas throughout the western United States, including Walter De Maria's *The Lightning Field* (1977) and Robert Smithson's *Spiral Jetty* (1970).<sup>62</sup> Huyghe decided that his project would need to examine this legacy, "I wanted to try to incorporate the history of this practice and in a certain way to register the manner in which there had been a shift in terms of these issues between the 'Dia generation' and my own generation of artists."<sup>63</sup> Expanding on the differences

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<sup>62</sup> Emerging in the 1960s, the artists associated with Land art incorporated the site and its surrounding context into their work. Submitting artistic form to the variable conditions of the environment—temperature, weather, lighting, and topography, for example—artists aimed to expand the work of art beyond the context of the exhibition frame. The changing conditions of the work emphasized sensory immediacy, foregrounding the viewer's phenomenological encounter with the site and rendering one's bodily presence into a constituent part of the work. For the most part, these "empty desert" artists regarded the context of their site as neutral, a blank slate with which to engage specific formal conditions.

<sup>63</sup> Baker and Huyghe, "An Interview with Pierre Huyghe," 81. A number of commentators have connected Huyghe's practice to Land art, Benjamin Buchloh argues that Huyghe's art "programmatically synthesizes seemingly incompatible strands of sculptural histories: Land art, in particular the work of Robert Smithson; Haacke's systems-theory sculptures, developed in dialogue with Jack Burnham; the mid- to late-'60s institutional critique of Buren." (Benjamin Buchloh, "Rock Paper Scissors," *Artforum* 56, no. 1 (September 2017): 285.); Vered Maimon also discusses the relationship with Robert Smithson, "It is as if Huyghe has turned Smithson's famous image of entropy, the sand box in Passaic, from an emblem of a ruin into a living habitat where ants and spiders form shapes and tunnels in the sand" (Vered Maimon, "Review of Pierre Huyghe, Edited by Emma Lavigne," *College Association of Art*, July 10, 2014, <https://doi.org/10.3202/caa.reviews.2014.78>).

between his project and Smithson's *Spiral Jetty*, Huyghe explains, "My interest was not in creating an object that escapes the exhibition frame only to merge with the landscape... It would no longer be something in the middle of nowhere, no longer subject to this fascination of the Earth artists with the empty desert. My work would be precisely *in-between* the city and nature, *in-between* this place of meetings, signs, and corporations, which is the city, and nature."<sup>64</sup> These sites—the city and nature—became the principle preoccupation of art in the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as artists shifted attention away from "the privacy of psychological space" to "the public, conventional nature of what might be called cultural space."<sup>65</sup> Huyghe's work calls both sites into question, challenging Land art's indifference to its public while also putting pressure on public art's demand for congenial community engagement.

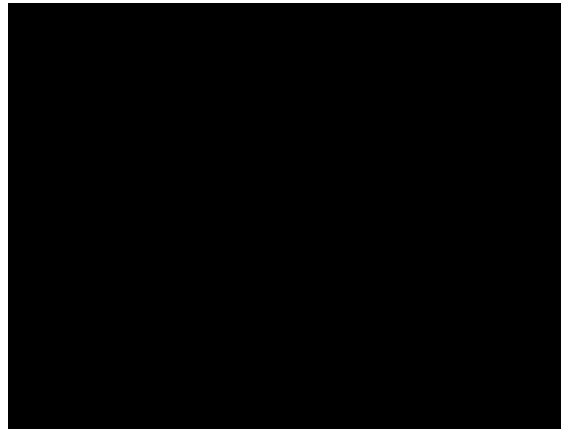


Figure 3.6. Robert Smithson, *Spiral Jetty*, 1970, 16 mm film (color, sound), film still.

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Dorothea von Hantelmann compares Huyghe's works to Walter de Maria's *Earth Room* (1977), "De Maria brings earth into the gallery space in New York, but both remain entirely disconnected from each other. While De Maria adds to a context, Huyghe's work essentially 'grows' out of its context" (Dorothea von Hantelmann, "Situated Cosmo-Technologies: Pierre Huyghe's Untilled and After A Life Ahead," in *Pierre Huyghe* [London: Serpentine Galleries, 2019], 15).; and Zachary Cahill aligns Huyghe's practice with the genre of landscape, "the landscape in many respects constitutes the primal scene of Huyghe's work" (Zachary Cahill, "Earth Without Aura: Notes on the Psychology of Contemporary Landscape," *Mousse*, no. 35 [November 2012]: 140).

<sup>64</sup> Baker and Huyghe, "An Interview with Pierre Huyghe," 82.

<sup>65</sup> Rosalind E Krauss, *Passages in Modern Sculpture* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2007), 270.

Despite his dismissal of “empty desert” art, Huyghe seems to have found inspiration in Smithson’s hybrid approach to landscape, which often incorporated paired natural geographies and industrial materials with essayistic travelogues and literary references. For example, Smithson accompanied his iconic *Spiral Jetty* sculpture with a film and essay, both of which blurred the lines between documentary and fiction. In the film, Smithson recites a passage from Samuel Beckett’s novel *The Unnamable*, voiced over footage filmed in the Hall of Late Dinosaurs at the American Museum of Natural History in New York.<sup>66</sup> Shot through a red filter, the scene takes on an otherworldly character, suggesting a journey to another planet or travel back to prehistoric times [Figure 3.6]. The final novel in a trilogy, *The Unnamable* takes the form of a monologue delivered by an ‘unnamable’ narrator. Revealed to be the same character, known under different aliases in the first two books, the protagonist seems to exist only through his own unreliable narration, appearing to be at once present and absent. In Smithson’s film, the passage quoted from Beckett oscillates between this sense of presence and absence:

Nothing has ever changed since I have been here. But I dare not infer from this that nothing ever will change. Let us try and see where these considerations lead. I have been here, ever since I began to be, my appearances elsewhere having been put in by other parties. All has proceeded, all this time, in the utmost calm, the most perfect order, apart from one or two manifestations the meaning of which escapes me. No, it not that their meaning escapes me, my own escapes me just as much. Here all things, no, I shall not say it, being unable to. I owe my existence to no one, these faint fires are not those that illuminate or burn.<sup>67</sup>

In many ways, the passage mirrors Smithson’s own site/non-site dialectic, which the artist described as a point of convergence that “consists of course of hazards, a double path made up of

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<sup>66</sup> For a detailed discussion of the relationship between Robert Smithson and Samuel Beckett, see Daniel Katz, “WHERE NOW? A Few Reflections on Beckett, Robert Smithson, and the Local,” *Samuel Beckett Today / Aujourd’hui* 22 (2010): 329–40.

<sup>67</sup> Samuel Beckett, “The Unnamable,” in *Molloy, Malone Dies, The Unnamable* (London: John Calder, 1915), 296.

signs, photographs, and maps that belong to both sides of the dialectic at once. Both sides are present and absent at the same time.”<sup>68</sup> That Smithson often made recourse to literature in his works, suggests that the fictive was one potential way that the artist conjured the ‘present and absent at the same time’. Following the lead of Smithson, Huyghe’s *Streamside Day* engages with documentary and fiction, creating a hybrid work that straddles nature and culture.

The project began to take shape during a trip to Dia: Beacon, when the artist happened upon Streamside Knolls, a new housing development in Fishkill, New York. Pitched to city dwellers as an escape to nature, the residential development seemed to be precisely the kind of in-between place Huyghe desired—a space suspended between a corporate real estate venture and a pastoral natural landscape. As Huyghe explains, “Streamside Knolls lies somewhere between nature and culture, history and mythology... This community is already united by a common cultural background and haunted by a few shared myths: the idea of wilderness, specifically the fantasy of returning to the purity of nature; the untouched witness of time past, and the idea of being at the origin of a new society that stands outside the rest of the world.”<sup>69</sup> Sited on a plot of land carved out of the forest in upstate New York, the same area once provided the inspiration for the idyllic 19<sup>th</sup>-century landscapes of Hudson River School painters.<sup>70</sup> Huyghe

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<sup>68</sup> Robert Smithson, “The Sprial Jetty,” in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, ed. Jack Flam (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 153n1.

<sup>69</sup> Pierre Huyghe et al., *Pierre Huyghe (Lavigne)*, ed. Emma Lavigne (Paris: Centre Pompidou, 2014), 124.

<sup>70</sup> Best known for their idealized portraits of untamed American wilderness, the Hudson River School painters created sublime landscapes that embodied the notions of unbridled adventurism and limitless abundance. These pictures helped bolster a national identity rooted in the concept of Manifest Destiny, projecting the land as the site for conquest. On the relationship between national identity and American landscape painting see Jennifer Raab, *Frederic Church: The Art and Science of Detail* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015); Angela L. Miller, *The Empire of the Eye: Landscape Representation and American Cultural Politics, 1825-1875* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993); Rebecca Bailey Bedell, *The Anatomy of Nature: Geology & American Landscape Painting, 1825-1875* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 2002);

made frequent trips to the Metropolitan Museum of Art to study these paintings, interested in the ways in which these tableaux seemed to blend documentation with an idealized fiction of the American wilderness [Figure 3.7]. Active from about 1825 to 1875, the Hudson River School painters celebrated the wildness of the American landscape, at a moment when this vision of untamed nature was quickly receding from view. As Diana Strazdes notes, “Hudson River School landscape painters followed closely the developing tourism... amenities for tourists were built and artists took advantage of them, although taking care to erase the signs of tourists from their paintings, to emphasize their sites as pristine wilderness.”<sup>71</sup> As Huyghe describes, “They sublimated the wildness of nature in its final moments; they were the first tourists, the pioneers of ecotourism, who went upstream to discover the Catskill Mountains. The exotic, docile ideal of ‘elsewhere’ was brought back to the city as a way to highlight industrial progress in the era of the World’s Fair.”<sup>72</sup> Already, Huyghe’s description homes in on the nostalgic sense of loss embedded in the Hudson River School depictions of the landscape. The progress of American industrialism in the city, hurdling toward ecological disaster, made the myth of unspoiled nature advanced by the Hudson River School all the more necessary. Thus, the paintings of the Hudson River School served an important narrative function for audiences, restaging a mythical first encounter with the untamed American wilderness. Huyghe found similarities with this past in *Streamside Knolls*, a community drawn to a wilderness already lost. *Streamside Day* centers on these moments of almost utopia, when the dream of a collective ideal meets its less-than-ideal reality.

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Albert Boime, *The Magisterial Gaze: Manifest Destiny and American Landscape Painting* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991); Diana Strazdes, “‘Wilderness and Its Waters’: A Professional Identity for the Hudson River School,” *Early American Studies* 7, no. 2 (2009): 333–62; and Andrew Wilton and T. J. Barringer, *American Sublime: Landscape Painting in the United States, 1820–1880* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2002).

<sup>71</sup> Strazdes, “Wilderness and Its Waters,” 335.

<sup>72</sup> Huyghe et al., *Pierre Huyghe (Lavigne)*, 124.



Figure 3.7. Asher Brown Durand, *The Beeches*, 1845, oil on canvas.

Huyghe also researched the early 19<sup>th</sup>-century utopian societies modeled by French philosopher Charles Fourier. Seeking to eradicate poverty, Fourier detailed plans for a socialist community in which members would work together harmoniously to fulfill the needs of every resident. Called *phalanstères*, Fourier imagined that each community of around 1600 people would be housed in a massive architectural complex that would integrate areas for socializing, education, and labor with the natural environment.<sup>73</sup> Fourierism experienced a short-lived boom in the United States during the 1840s, with the establishment of thirty communes, however, by the mid-1850s all but one commune had disbanded.<sup>74</sup> Although distanced from the socialist principles undergirding Fourierism,<sup>75</sup> the Levittowns and other planned suburban communities

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<sup>73</sup> For an excellent study of Fourierism in practice see Jacques Rancière, *Proletarian Nights: The Workers' Dream in Nineteenth-Century France* (London: Verso, 2014). Relying on primary texts written by the working class, Rancière details how Fourierism was conceptualized and practiced by the proletariat in 19<sup>th</sup> century France.

<sup>74</sup> See Carl J. Guarneri, "Importing Fourierism to America," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 43, no. 4 (1982): 581–94. Fourier's ideas inspired the design of Le Corbusier's *Unité d'Habitation* in Marseilles, France, which subsequently influenced the design of many ill-fated mid-century public housing projects in the US.

<sup>75</sup> William Levitt suggested that private homeownership might even stave off Communist organizing in America, declaring, "No one who owns his own house and lot can be a

that emerged in the US during the 1950s employed from some of the same organizational principles:

The newest Levittown was to be a full-fledged community... Three basic house types... would be built on the same street and organized into separate neighborhoods of about 1200 homes, each served by an elementary school, playground, and swimming pool. The complex of ten or twelve neighborhoods would be complemented by a set of community-wide facilities, including a large shopping center, some smaller ones, and of course high schools, a library, and parks.<sup>76</sup>

The Levittown remains the prototype for many modern suburban plans, inspiring more recent commercial ventures like Celebration, Florida, a planned residential community designed by the Disney Corporation.<sup>77</sup> During his research for *Streamside Day*, Huyghe traveled to Celebration to uncover, as the artist describes, the way that “Walt Disney and his Imagineers tried to build societies, not only as entertainment sites, but also as places in which to live.”<sup>78</sup> Disney, that place that theorist Jean Baudrillard deemed the “perfect model of all the entangled orders of

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Communist.” (Quoted in Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987], 231).

<sup>76</sup> Herbert J. Gans, *The Levittowners: Ways of Life and Politics in a New Suburban Community*, (New York: Pantheon, 1967), xvii. For more on Levittown and the development of the American suburbs see Dianne Suzette Harris, *Second Suburb: Levittown, Pennsylvania* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2013); Baxandall and Ewen, *Picture Windows: How the Suburbs Happened* (New York: Basic Books, 2000); Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*; David Kushner, *Levittown Two Families, One Tycoon, and the Fight for Civil Rights in America’s Legendary Suburb* (New York: Walker & Co, 2009). The postwar artist Dan Graham made the bleak monotony of suburban tract housing the subject of his iconic photo-essay *Homes for America*, a conceptual work published in *Arts Magazine*. Presented with repetitive, grid-like uniformity, Graham’s work aligned the suburban aesthetic with conceptual art’s serial procedures (Dan Graham, “Homes for America,” *Arts Magazine* 41, no. 3 [December 1966]: 21–22). See also, Benjamin Buchloh, “Moments of History in the Work of Dan Graham,” in *Neo-Avantgarde and Culture Industry: Essays on European and American Art from 1955 to 1975* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2003), 179–201.

<sup>77</sup> While communities like Celebration capitalize on the nostalgia for an idyllic past embodied by communities like Levittown, it bears remembering that these communities were often established on principles of racial segregation, Levitt’s contracts, for example included a restrictive covenant agreeing “not to permit the premises to be used or occupied by any person other than members of the Caucasian race.”

<sup>78</sup> Huyghe et al., *Pierre Huyghe (Lavigne)*, 124.

simulacra,”<sup>79</sup> marketed Celebration as a nostalgic return to the old American towns of yore.

Seemingly, pulled from the same language used by the theme park Imagineers, advertisements for the town harkened back to a romantic past:

There is a place that takes you back to that time of innocence. A place where the biggest decision is whether to play Kick the Can or King of the Hill. A place of caramel apples and cotton candy, secret forts, and hopscotch on the streets. That place is here again, in a new town called Celebration....A new American town of block parties and Fourth of July parades. Of spaghetti dinners and school bake sales, lollipops, and fireflies in a jar. And while we can't return to these times we can arrive at a place that embraces all of these things. Someday, 20,000 people will live in Celebration, and for each and every one of them, it will be home.<sup>80</sup>

Huyghe found many parallels between Celebration and Streamside Knolls, newly established communities that nevertheless cultivated a self-image steeped in the idea of a fictional American past. Using this fiction as a starting point, Huyghe decided to create a festival honoring the “birthday of a new community.” As Huyghe explains, “The community here was attracted to ideas of ecology, ecotourism, environmental issues. They were interested in going backward—it was, in a sense, postmodern. The homes in *Streamside Day Follies* were being advertised, literally, as ‘postmodern housing’. It was about going back to the past, tradition, nature, animals—ways of life from the past.”<sup>81</sup> Shuttling between fiction and reality, the resulting work contrasts the aspirations of the Streamside Knolls community, as formulated through the development firm’s marketing, to the utterly banal reality of a collection of standardized units of homes situated in a dusty bulldozed landscape [Figure 3.8].

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<sup>79</sup> Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 12.

<sup>80</sup> Quoted in Andrew Ross, *The Celebration Chronicles: Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Property Value in Disney’s New Town*. (London: Verso, 2000), 18. On Celebration, see also, Douglas Frantz and Catherine Collins, *Celebration, U.S.A.: Living in Disney’s Brave New Town* (New York: Owl/Holt, 2000).

<sup>81</sup> Baker and Huyghe, “An Interview with Pierre Huyghe,” 85.

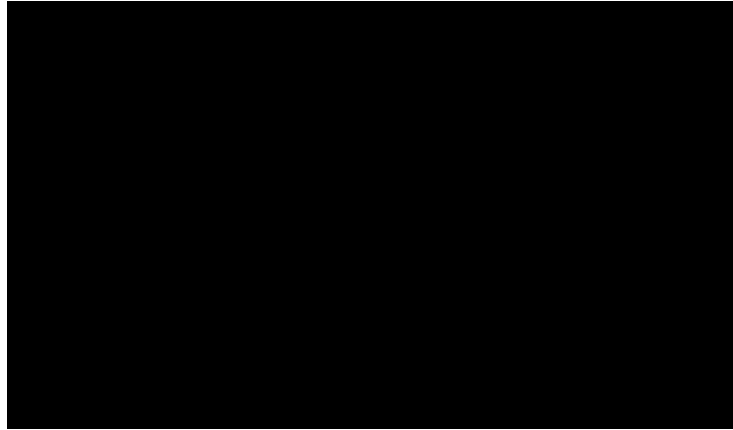


Figure 3.8. Pierre Huyghe, *Streamside Day*, 2003, film still.

Huyghe reached out to the residents of Streamside Knolls with a proposal for an annual celebration. The artist announced the project in a press release placed on the city council website, along with a statement outlining his scenario for the project:

We are in the year 01, at the beginning of a story which you are already a part of. Between the mountains and the banks of the Hudson River, a village is forming in the forest. Families are moving in, construction of streets and houses is almost complete, gardens are growing, and soon the playgrounds will be filled.<sup>82</sup>

A poster promoting the event promised many of the mainstays of a small-town celebration:

“parade and costumes...banners, balloons and t-shirts...ice cream, lemonade, and green cotton candy.”<sup>83</sup> Huyghe designed every aspect of the celebration, which revolved around a carefully crafted set of symbols and rituals that related to the eco-fantasy at the heart of the community.

The day began with a parade, led by a piper in a rabbit costume, who guided participants through the streets of the residential development. Participants donned animal costumes—owl masks, bunny suits, and racoon heads—that referred back to the notion of the wilderness, but also

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<sup>82</sup> “Press Release for Streamside Day” (Dia: Chelsea, 2003). Huyghe’s reference to year 01 plays on the French Revolutionary Calendar which proclaimed 1792 as Year I of the republic (Matthew John Shaw, *Time and the French Revolution: The Republican Calendar, 1789-Year XIV* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012], 30). Contrasted with the revolutionary tumult of the French Revolution, Huyghe’s ambitions for *Streamside* appear even more banal.

<sup>83</sup> Pierre Huyghe, flyer for *Streamside Day*.

resembled the suits donned by Disney mascots [Fig. TK].<sup>84</sup> Throughout the day, children constructed houses from cardboard—a nod to the recently discarded moving boxes families used to relocate to Streamside Knolls [Figure 3.9]. The day culminated with a tree planting ceremony, marking the community’s emergence from the wilderness. As Huyghe explains, these motifs were designed to give the nascent community a past and a set of traditions that could be reanimated on an annual basis like a holiday, “I would set up a time-based event, and it would be a celebration. Hopefully, if the event is successful, this celebration will be repeated, on the same day every year. It will be like Halloween, or like Christmas. What is Halloween, at its source? There is a scenario for this event too.”<sup>85</sup> *Streamside Day* transmitted nostalgia for ritual and tradition, but also pointed to the ways in which traditions have become commodified:

What is a celebration? A celebration is supposed to be something that we have in common, that we share, and that we celebrate because of this common basis...Mainly, planting a custom is about setting up a stable repetition. It is a marketing strategy, and all you need is to fill the year with traditions, to create a permanent celebration.<sup>86</sup>

In particular, Huyghe emphasizes the commercial aspect inherent to contemporary holidays, explaining, “Traditional holidays (Christmas, May Day, the techno parade) have always been rooted in religious or social events. Christmas is the most celebrated holiday, but its religious symbols, even though they may be diminishing in importance, make it difficult for everyone to accept. A new tradition has arrived: Halloween, all social, religious or political dimensions are absent, enabling the possible recuperation of this generic holiday in which merchandising is celebrated.”<sup>87</sup> Huyghe used certain motifs like icons or logos to brand his invented custom, “The

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<sup>84</sup> The costumes resemble those used in Huyghe’s earlier work *La Toison d’or* (1993), an event in which teenagers wearing animal heads roamed through a park in Dijon, France.

<sup>85</sup> Baker and Huyghe, “An Interview with Pierre Huyghe,” 85.

<sup>86</sup> Baker and Huyghe, 85.

<sup>87</sup> Huyghe, Gillick, and Parreno, *Pierre Huyghe*, 190.

tree and the cardboard box are signs of this tradition, just as a pumpkin stands for Halloween.”<sup>88</sup>

In *Streamside Day*, Huyghe blends fantasy, marketing strategy, and documentary to provide a portrait of a place that makes little distinction between these genres. *Streamside Day* points to the collapse of experience into representation in our present moment; in the work, storytelling is an instrument of fantasy but also an artifact of a marketing apparatus. The difficulty in distinguishing between the two is precisely the point for Huyghe, tradition (the past) and innovation (the future) give way to innovated traditions (futures without pasts) and traditional innovations (pasts without futures) and capitalism becomes ritual.

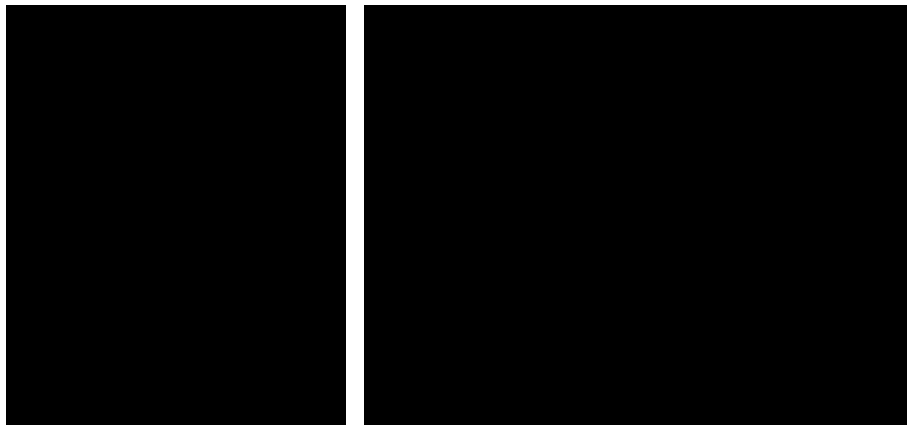


Figure 3.9. Pierre Huyghe, *Streamside Day*, 2003, production still (left); film still (right).

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*“Capitalism is based on rituals; it needs stories to be told in order to exist...in a consumer society the place of the product and the stories you tell around it are actually what make the product the product.”<sup>89</sup>*

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<sup>88</sup> Christov-Bakargiev, *Pierre Huyghe (Skira)*, 147.

<sup>89</sup> Pierre Huyghe, “Garden Party,” *Artforum International* 43, no. 2 (October 2004): 144.

In *Streamside Day*, Huyghe disrupts the relationship between the score, the event, and its representation. Blending documentary footage with fictional narratives, the film accompanying the project takes cues from Robert Smithson's film *Spiral Jetty*, Huyghe explains:

The film *Spiral Jetty*, for example, exists at an intersection of science, fiction, document, and travel. The film becomes a thing in itself. It has this double effect. And I don't think I see that so often in the many 'documentary' artworks today. For me, documentation really has something to do with the problem of the trace. I think some of the people of my generation are trying to get around the problem of the factual report by introducing a fictional parameter into the account, the real and the unreal dialogue. A coefficient of fiction has infiltrated the preproduction of a project itself, in its narrative protocols as well as in its mediation. The place of presentation is real, but it incorporates fictional elements. The fiction is a reality principle.<sup>90</sup>

Huyghe develops his fictions from the myths and narratives that already organize the Streamside community, the artist describes, "Far from superimposing an imported imaginary on a reality already full of fictional potentialities, *Streamside Day* grows and persists in co-presence with the context in which it first appeared. It is a capitalist tale, inscribed into the cultural fabric of a given body, a given organization, and those characters are the protagonists."<sup>91</sup> Through a series of reversals, the project destabilizes the relationship between consumer and experience. If in the typical marketing scenario, the customer-participant acts as the end user, allowing the memorable event to imprint on him, for Huyghe the story becomes the starting point for action. The resulting dislocations make the moment of the event unclear, both present and deferred to a future.

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<sup>90</sup> Tim Griffin, ed., "Remote Possibilities: A Roundtable Discussion on Land Art's Changing Terrain," *Artforum International* 43, no. 10 (Summer 2005): 366.

<sup>91</sup> Huyghe et al., *Pierre Huyghe (Lavigne)*, 125.

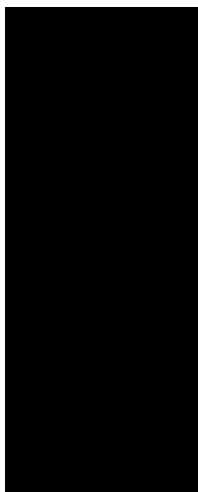


Figure 3.10. Advertisement for Streamside Knolls, *New York Daily News*, April 6, 2001.

To create *Streamside Day*, Huyghe began by researching a physical reality—a housing development in upstate New York. However, Huyghe quickly discovered that this reality was already infused with a fantastical narrative, an advertisement placed in the *New York Daily News* enjoined prospective residents to “Step out your front door and take a deep breath. Smell the clean, crisp air. Feel the crackle of leaves and twigs under your feet. This is quintessential country living at its finest.”<sup>92</sup> [Figure 3.10] This branding narrative forms the basis for the first part of Huyghe’s film, a wilderness fantasy that unfolds onsite, in the Streamside Knolls housing complex. Residues of the scenic idealism of the Hudson River school painters are evident in the first moments of Huyghe’s film, which opens in a lush forest landscape, where a single fawn sits with a rabbit and an owl [Figure 3.11]. If, however, the idealized 19<sup>th</sup>-century scenes show a nature untarnished by the presence of man, Huyghe’s scene seems too tableau-like, unnatural

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<sup>92</sup> “Advertisement for Streamside Knolls,” *New York Daily News*, April 6, 2001, 157. The advertisement’s appeal to “country living” tapped into the larger modernist fascination with “the going away”, which scholars have identified as a key component of avant-gardist myths of originality. Regarding the primitivism of artists such as Paul Gauguin, Gill Perry describes, “‘The going away’ to the remote rural provinces—or to the supposed margins of civilization—came to be seen as a crucial feature of late nineteenth-century avant-gardism...often identified as evidence of ‘originality’.” (Gill Perry, “Primitivism and the ‘Modern,’” in *Primitivism, Cubism, Abstraction: The Early Twentieth-Century* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993], 8).

even—the animals are actually trained to reenact the opening scene of Disney’s classic film *Bambi*. The story follows two young girls who pack up their old home and then travel to Streamside Knolls. Emerging from the wilderness, the girls arrive at their new home, where the tamed deer walks through the streets of the residential complex and awkwardly enters a newly built house [Figure 3.12]. The resulting fiction serves as the score for a celebration that can be enacted in real time in the actual community of Streamside Knolls.



Figure 3.11. Pierre Huyghe, *Streamside Day*, 2003, production still.

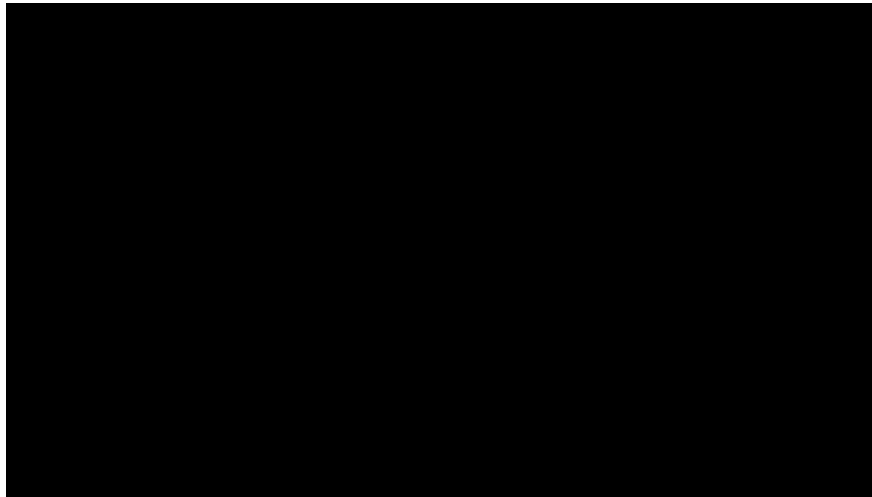


Figure 3.12. Pierre Huyghe, *Streamside Day*, 2003, film still.

The second part of Huyghe's film incorporates documentary footage of the celebration, serving as "a guideline for the yearly replaying of this new tradition."<sup>93</sup> Rather than focusing on the convivial aspects of the celebration, the footage captures the utterly mundane, banal aspects of everyday experience. A pickup truck unceremoniously transports a scrawny tree to be planted; impatient children begin to skirmish with one another; unwieldy components of costumes are gradually discarded as bored audience members await the announcements of city officials; the stage's low-quality PA system intermittently screeches with feedback as speakers fumble with handing over the microphone; slightly off-key, the local band plays a refrain which redundantly repeats the lyrics "It's a Streamside Day Celebration" to a disinterested audience distracted by a spread of desserts [Figure 3.13].<sup>94</sup> Here, the sociality enabled by the project appears at times forced and habituated. A speech by a local official grimly summarizes the whole affair, as a town supervisor cheerfully proclaims that Streamside Day marks an instance of "art, the environment, and economic development sharing a stage."<sup>95</sup> The event as a whole displays a hyperbolic artificiality, heightened by a light-filled balloon that hovers over the day's proceedings like a false moon, underlining the ubiquitous absence of nature within the community [Figure 3.13].<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Christov-Bakargiev, *Pierre Huyghe (Skira)*, 147.

<sup>94</sup> Huyghe's assistant composed the lyrics for the song while idly singing to himself in the studio: "a flower blossom, raising through the falling leaves, the day's just begun, light through the trees, this is the same light that falls in dreams. It's a Streamside Celebration."

<sup>95</sup> David Joselit, "Inside the Light Cube: Pierre Huyghe's Streamside Day Follies and the Rise of Video Projection," *Artforum* 42, no. 7 (March 2004): 158.

<sup>96</sup> The balloon gives an uncanny glow to the scene drawing allusions to the cool, hard lighting effects of 19<sup>th</sup>-century Luminist painters. Luminism was first codified as an artistic category in 1954 by art historian John Baur. Baur used the term to describe a subset of Hudson River School artists, such as Fitz Hugh Lane and Martin Johnson Heade, whose pictures were characterized by "horizontal orientation, relatively small size, and magical light effects" (H. Daniel Peck, "Unlikely Kindred Spirits: A New Vision of Landscape in the Works of Henry David Thoreau and Asher B. Durand," *American Literary History* 17, no. 4 (2005): 706.) In opposition to the more theatrical romanticism of artists such as Thomas Cole and Arthur B. Durand, Baur aligned Luminist landscapes with the everyday transcendentalism espoused by Ralph Waldo Emerson

As Huyghe explains, “The colorful tone of the event, as it was enacted the first time—banners without slogans, the pastel shades of donuts, and the pale luminosity of the balloon—had something in common with the friable appearance of the polystyrene Dunkin’ Donuts cups: a light, immaculate, and temporary surface.”<sup>97</sup>

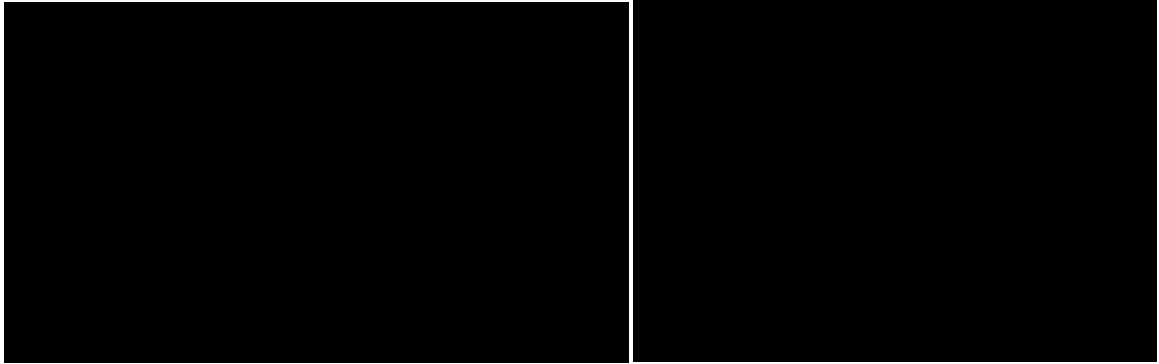


Figure 3.13. Pierre Huyghe, *Streamside Day*, 2003, film stills.

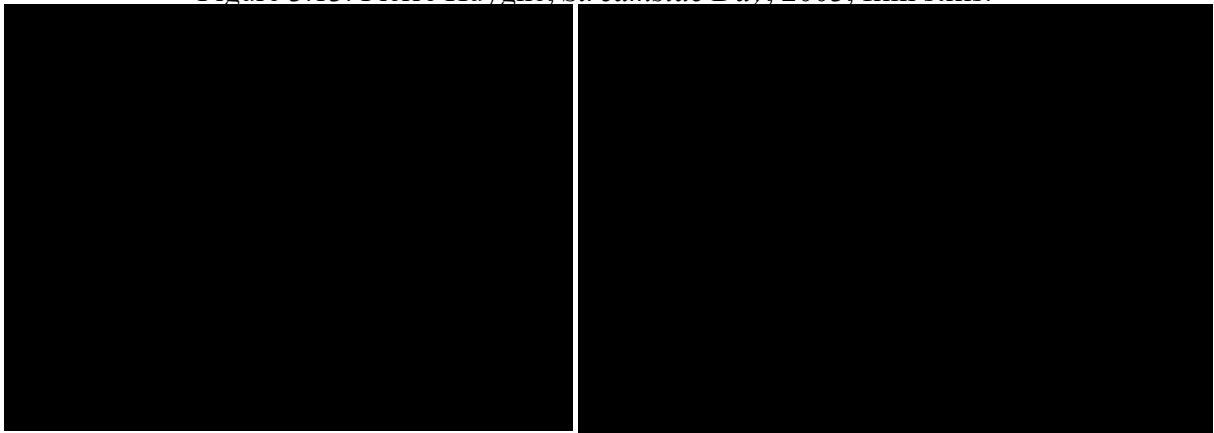


Figure 3.14. Pierre Huyghe, *Streamside Day Follies*, 2003–2004, installation views, Dia Chelsea, October 31, 2003–January 11, 2004.

In the exhibition *Streamside Day Follies*, held at Dia: Chelsea, Huyghe projected the film within an automated installation that would at times transform into a pavilion. In the gallery,

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and Henry David Thoreau. See John Baur, “American Luminism: A Neglected Aspect of the Realist Movement in Nineteenth-Century America,” *Perspectives USA*, no. 9 (Autumn 1954): 90–98; Barbara Novak, “On Defining Luminism,” in *American Light: The Luminist Movement 1850-1875*, ed. John Wilmerding (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1980), 23–30.

<sup>97</sup> Huyghe et al., *Pierre Huyghe (Lavigne)*, 125.

viewers encountered what looked to be an empty room, save for five tracks for temporary walls attached to the ceiling. Slowly, five movable walls located in separate rooms mechanically moved along these tracks, meeting in the center of the gallery to form a pentagonal projection room [Figure 3.14]. In order to view the film, visitors were forced to assemble together within the temporary pavilion, transforming the passive black box video projection into something more like an animatronic Disney ride. After the duration of the film, the mechanical walls would gradually move back to their original positions, allowing the temporary community of viewers to disperse. Huyghe hoped that this process will create room for dialogue and reflection, he explains:

I'm less interested in dramatic, linear processes where there's a planned protocol. I'm more interested in open scenarios. Douglas Coupland told Disney that the problem with their films is that they're too efficient, too seamless. I feel like recently every film or narrative structure is becoming too efficient. There's no time to be distracted, you know what I mean? There's no time to find your own time in the narrative. Rather than become a part of the film, you are held at a distance from it. It then becomes only an icon. It dominates. There is no possible dialogue between it and you.<sup>98</sup>

Huyghe's mechanized film presentation forced viewers to physically act, requiring them to decide whether they would assemble inside the pavilion or choose to remain outside. Crucially, there is nothing natural or self-evident about this temporary assembly. At every point, the work points to its artifice, it presents experience *as staged*—first as a work of art scored by Pierre Huyghe, then as a choreographed community celebration infused with a “polystyrene smell,” then as a Disneyfied narrative film, and finally as a gathering space that refuses, literally, to hold together. The continued assembly and disassembly of the pavilion mirrored the cyclical time that Huyghe hoped his invented holiday would take on: “The project exists in the cyclical temporal structure that the exhibition is built on. It is an enduring event that reemerges on a regular basis,

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<sup>98</sup> Doug Aitken and Pierre Huyghe, “Pierre Huyghe,” *BOMB*, no. 89 (October 2004): 43.

an auto-generating system that develops at its own rhythm.”<sup>99</sup> This sense of an auto-generating system, or community, also formed the basis of Huyghe’s plan to build a community center in Streamside Knolls, with the help of the architect François Roche [Figure 3.15].

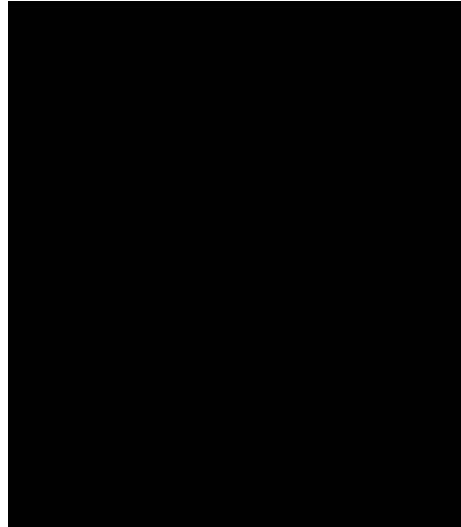


Figure 3.15. Pierre Huyghe, Plan for Community Center, 2003.

Examining Huyghe’s proposal for the center, it is unclear how the plans would translate into an actual architectural structure or if there ever was a sincere intention to construct a space.

Two synopses are proposed for the community center:

Synopsis 1: A building, its specificity lies in its faculty to react to the community’s ability to celebrate its own existence. It can grow or react accordingly. A building—a breathing organism. Modes of access would only be available on the occasion of the celebration, as in certain clockwork mechanisms. During the rest of the year, the building could also be used to celebrate the birthdays of the community members (Birthday House).<sup>100</sup>

In this first scenario, Huyghe suggests that the community center might operate like the mechanical walls in the *Streamside Day Follies* exhibition. Reacting to ‘the community’s ability to celebrate its own existence,’ the community center would come together only to allow for the annual celebration of Streamside Day and possibly for birthdays. In this way, the structure would

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<sup>99</sup> Huyghe et al., *Pierre Huyghe (Lavigne)*, 124.

<sup>100</sup> Christov-Bakargiev, *Pierre Huyghe (Skira)*, 147.

provide for the community's temporary assembly and disassembly, much like the provisional pavilion in the Dia exhibition. The second synopsis proposes a center that would adopt a setting in the wilderness as a means of figuring the community's relationship to nature:

Synopsis 2: This environment would be built in the heart of the forest, forest of myths of origins, playing out the complexity between what is within, without, on the edge, in various movements. Its layout would mix human activities with wild fauna, domestic fauna like a fold between a here and now situation and a naturalist artificial construct. One must imagine a portion of territory in a cage, not like a zoo but like a place where the animals within are the same as those without, although domesticated. This 'animal cage' could fold topologically according to these two movements, so that they can mingle or be 'ambiguous'.<sup>101</sup>

The looseness of Huyghe's architectural proposals suggests that the community center is more of a notional idea for how celebration might be formed in the future, rather than a concrete building plan meant to be realized. A wall drawing of the community center consists of a knotted tangle of curved lines, rendered in a light gray that is barely visible against the white ground. The interlocking folds mirror the sort of in-between space that originally attracted Huyghe to the Streamside community. While the structure is unrealizable, it is perhaps best to think of the community center as a suggestion for a future scenario, instructions for a game that might be played out in the future. In *Streamside*, Huyghe mobilizes the structure of the community-engaged artwork while breaking free from its documentarian approach, planting a kernel of fiction that might open the possibility for real transformation. The artist explains, "Each repetition is a reformulation, a reinvention to present themselves, a moment to renegotiate its own myth and to put into constant play and variation its own identity features. *Streamside Day* establishes the conditions for the possibility of a ritualistic event to gradually break free from its sources, the imaginative abilities of its actors being its only limit."<sup>102</sup> Here, Huyghe's language

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<sup>101</sup> Christov-Bakargiev, 147.

<sup>102</sup> Huyghe et al., *Pierre Huyghe (Lavigne)*, 125.

mirrors sociologist Bruno Latour, who builds a theory of the in-between as a way of understanding our relation to the social. In *We Have Never Been Modern*, Latour challenges the modern separation between nature and culture, which “renders the work of mediation that assembles hybrids invisible, unthinkable, unrepresentable.”<sup>103</sup> Latour proposes that we attend to the ‘quasi-object’ as a way of breaking open the rigid structure presupposed by modern binaries. Moving beyond static distinctions like subject/object or nature/culture, Latour suggests that the quasi-object becomes visible through a network of associations that transcend any category or discipline. This shift has profound implications for how we conceive of the social, which we can no longer imagine as a separate reified entity, but rather a constantly shifting network composed of subjects and objects, nature and culture, science and politics, the individual and the group. For Latour, each node of the network is an actor, capable of influencing and reforming the network as a whole. If we configure the social as an ever-transforming network, the notion of a fixed societal group becomes untenable, as Latour describes, there is “no group, only group formation.”<sup>104</sup> Thus, a given community and the myths sustaining it are constantly fluctuating, “Relating to one group or another is an on-going process made up of uncertain, fragile, controversial, and ever-shifting ties”<sup>105</sup> There is perhaps no better place to site *Streamside Day* than the American suburbs—those quintessentially in-between spaces—equal parts Fourierism and Celebration Park, Hudson River School and *Bambi*, eco-consciousness and deforestation, wilderness and marketing pitch. Given visual form by Huyghe, each of these ever-shifting ties has the potential to modify the whole, providing for the community’s continual reinvention.

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<sup>103</sup> Bruno Latour and Catherine Porter, *We Have Never Been Modern* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2011), 34.

<sup>104</sup> Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 27.

<sup>105</sup> Latour, 28.

## Chapter Four: 'No Encounters': *Untilled and After ALife Ahead*

The last chapter examined contemporary art's embrace of experiences, charting the ways artists and museums have responded to the seeming disembodiment of the digital age with forms of embodied engagement. In *Streamside Day*, Huyghe challenged the presumed neutrality of these experiences, uncovering the myths that organize communities, in the form of marketing slogans, Disney films, the American wilderness, and so on. Operating in-between nature and culture, material and artifice, and fact and fantasy, Huyghe established new hybrid myths, providing the foundation for the community's reinvention of itself. Following *Streamside Day*, Huyghe continued to experiment with self-generating systems, organizing complex, interconnected networks blending cultural myths, economic factors, historical references, natural organisms, and technological systems. The principle of "leaking" is central to how Huyghe conceives of these works, as the artist describes, "I'm interested in the vitality of the image, in the way an idea, an artifact, leaks into a biological or mineral reality."<sup>1</sup> The opportunities for more porous networks also grow as Huyghe's projects increase in scale. Again, the space of in-betweenness provides fertile ground for Huyghe, establishing indeterminacy rather than fixity, reinvention rather than stasis. This chapter examines Huyghe's biological works, which integrate living environments and fictional scenarios. Deploying live plants and animals as crucial elements in his work, Huyghe has built complex ecosystems, including a forest installed in the Sydney Opera House (*Forest of Lines*, 2008); a garden planted with flora representing major holidays (*Les Saison des Fêtes*, 2010); a series of aquariums filled with marine life (*Zoodram*,

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<sup>1</sup> Sky Goodden, "Pierre Huyghe Explains His Buzzy Documenta 13 Installation and Why His Work Is Not Performance Art," *ARTINFO Canada*, August 30, 2012, <http://www.artinfo.com/news/story/822127/>.

2009-13); a person infected with the influenza virus (*Influenced*, 2011); colonies of spiders and ants embedded in gallery walls (*Umwelt*; 2011); a white dog with a painted pink leg wandering through a compost site (*Untilled*, 2011-12); and a swarm of bees covering the head of a reclining nude statue (*Untilled [Liegender Frauenakt]*, 2012) [Figure 4.1].

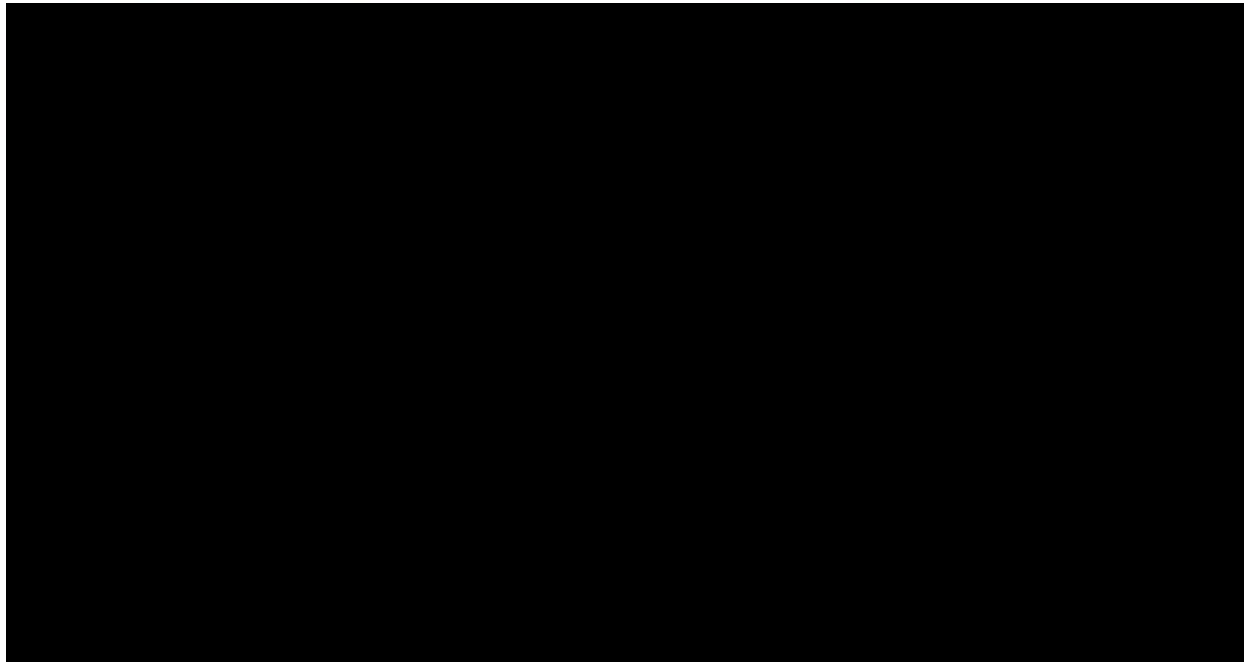


Figure 4.1. Selection of Pierre Huyghe's environmental works. Left to right: Pierre Huyghe, *A Forest of Lines*, 2008; event, Sydney Opera House; *La Saison des Fêtes*; installation view, Palacio de Cristal, Madrid, March 17–May 31, 2010; *Zoodram 1*, 2010, live marine ecosystem, glass tank, filtration system; *Umwelt*, 2011; ants and spiders on wall; *Untilled*, 2011–12, living entities and inanimate things, made or not made; *Untilled [Liegender Frauenakt]*, 2012, concrete with beehive structure, wax, and live bee colony.

Scholarship on these works has interpreted Huyghe's use of living organisms within the context of a wider 'ecological turn' in contemporary art.<sup>2</sup> For the most part, the ecological

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<sup>2</sup> For example, Luke Skrebowski suggests that "Huyghe's career exemplifies the wider 'ecologization' of artistic practice" (Luke Skrebowski, "On Pierre Huyghe's *Umwelt*," *Grey Room*, no. 77 [October 1, 2019]: 67). Likewise, André Rottmann argues that "Huyghe's more recent projects—especially *After A Life Ahead* (installed at Skulptur Projekte Münster in 2017)—epitomize the 'ecologization' of contemporary art." (André Rottmann, "'The Medium Is Leaking': Notes on the Work of Pierre Huyghe and the 'Ecologization' of Contemporary Art," *Grey Room*, no. 77

readings of Huyghe's work have tended to characterize his approach as an "environmentalist critique" or as a sort of wide-ranging indictment of the Anthropocene.<sup>3</sup> In his volume on Eco Art, Mark Cheetham describes that Huyghe's work is "self-consciously linked to both Robert Smithson's land art and a central eco-art cause, global warming."<sup>4</sup> Likewise, Susan Ballard describes Huyghe's practice as symptomatic of a "new approach to the ecological disaster of species extinction"<sup>5</sup> and argues that his work demonstrates "how humans might sympathetically engage with ecological transformation, and thus the confronting possibility of our own extinction."<sup>6</sup> Similarly, Daniel Falb argues that works such as Huyghe's *Zoodram 4 (Recollection)* "unmistakably [show] the Earth what is lost by becoming anthropocenic."<sup>7</sup> It would be a mistake, however, to reduce Huyghe's work to a romantic call for some kind of return to nature; after all, *Streamside Day* showed that such returns are impossible, our idea of nature will always already be mediated by marketing slogans. While any project incorporating plants and animals will inevitably draw associations with the Anthropocene, excessive emphasis on

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[October 1, 2019]: 85). See also Mark Cheetham, *Landscape Into Eco Art : Articulations of Nature Since the '60s* (University Park, Pennsylvania: Penn State University Press, 2018); Susan Ballard, "New Ecological Sympathies: Thinking about Contemporary Art in the Age of Extinction," *Environmental Humanities* 9, no. 2 (November 2017): 255–79; Daniel Falb, "Epistemologies of Art in the Anthropocene," in *Art in the Periphery of the Center*, ed. Christoph Behnke, Cornelia Kastelan, and Ulf Wuggenig (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2015), 302–17.

<sup>3</sup> For more on Huyghe's relationship to environmentalism see Paul Finnegan, "The 'Idea of Natural History' in the Work of Pierre Huyghe," *Antennae*, no. 50 (Spring 2020): 95–117; Andy Weir, "Myrmecochory Occurs: Exhibiting Indifference to the Participating Subject in Pierre Huyghe's Untilled (2012) at Documenta 13," *Postgraduate Journal of Aesthetics* 10, no. 1 (Spring 2013): 29–40; Marloe Mens, "Contemporary Art in the Anthropocene: A Posthuman Approach of the Human and Animal" (Amsterdam, University of Amsterdam, 2018); Lachlan Taylor, "The Geological Present: A Critique of the Aesthetic Anthropocene" (Wellington, Victoria University of Wellington, 2018).

<sup>4</sup> Cheetham, *Landscape Into Eco Art*, 131.

<sup>5</sup> Ballard, "New Ecological Sympathies," 277.

<sup>6</sup> Ballard, 257.

<sup>7</sup> Falb, "Epistemologies of Art in the Anthropocene," 314.

Huyghe’s environmentalism can occlude one of Huyghe’s key concerns—namely, the artist’s long-standing desire to develop protocols that challenge the temporality of the exhibition framework.<sup>8</sup> As Huyghe explains, he turned to living organisms to get away from critique in this limited sense:

I am trying to introduce an indeterminate possibility, some life. To attain this, it is necessary to reduce the intensity of intention, otherwise it is design, staging, choreography, therefore written. These were things I used in a critical manner ten years ago, until I realized that critique didn’t interest me anymore. I would rather absorb the opposites to allow for some semantic porosity. There is no hierarchical or ideological system which will classify, tidy up, order, or simplify to make things reassuring, and as a result I accept weakness, accidents, mistakes, and a certain level of loss of control. But that is how zones of non-knowing are created. In this, the living assumes its importance.<sup>9</sup>

Staging and choreography—terms that Huyghe used liberally in his early practice—no longer felt sufficient for the artist. While Huyghe’s scenario for *Streamside Day* closely mirrored the carefully staged encounters of the experience economy, later works remain more open-ended and unpredictable. In the works discussed below, Huyghe specifically engages with the historical origins of museums, calling into question the rationalizing impulse of those institutions that ‘classify, tidy up, order, or simplify’. This challenge becomes all the more urgent as museums embrace the experience economy, a phenomenon that threatens to render human experience into one more object on display, optimized through so many data points and attendance metrics. Drawing nature into the art context, Huyghe opens his work to semantic porosity, allowing for accidents, cross-contamination, and transformation.

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<sup>8</sup> In many ways, Huyghe’s nature works are continuations of Huyghe’s early attempts to extend the timeframe of the exhibition. See for example, *The Association of Freed Time* described in the previous chapter (Page TK).

<sup>9</sup> Philippe Chiambaretta, Pierre Huyghe, and Eric Troncy, “Living Systems,” *Stream 3* (2014), <https://www.pca-stream.com/en/articles/living-systems-14>.

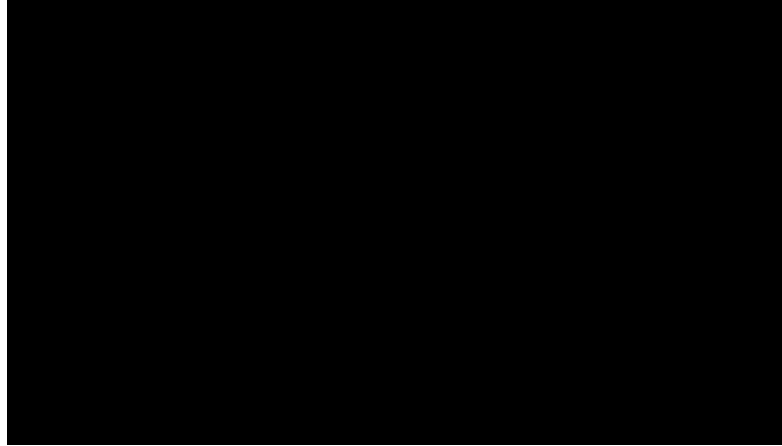


Figure 4.2. Pierre Huyghe, *La Saison des Fêtes*, 2010, Palacio de Cristal, Madrid, March 17–May 31, 2010.

### *Early Habitats*

Already in his early work, Huyghe had begun to integrate living organisms into his art. For example, several scenes from the *Streamside Day* film captured a trained deer walking through the forest and wandering into a suburban housing complex. As discussed in the previous chapter, the deer blurred distinctions between the natural and artificial as it reenacted scenes from *Bambi* and awkwardly perambulated through the manmade construction site. In this sense, the animal mirrored the logic of Huyghe's invented celebration, which mined the community's dual identity as picturesque ecoadventure and marketing slogan. As Huyghe turned to more elaborate ecosystems, he continued to explore concerns initiated in *Streamside Day*—blending elements of pagan rituals and commercial holidays to probe the relationships between the natural and artificial, fictive and documentarian. Although Huyghe's excursions into nature may seem far removed from the museum context, his ecological projects are deeply engaged with the history and origins of museums. While responding to these legacies, Huyghe explores alternative temporal and spatial frameworks that make it difficult to discern the contours or limits of his exhibitions.

Following *Streamside Day*, Huyghe created *Les Saison des Fêtes* (2010), a large garden installed in the Palacio de Cristal, an iconic 19<sup>th</sup> century greenhouse in Madrid's Buen Retiro Park [Figure 4.2].<sup>10</sup> Expressions of biological and technological wonder, the natural history museums, zoological gardens, and world expositions that flourished during this period were also intimately tied to the colonial impulse to catalogue and quantify the world's resources.<sup>11</sup> Built in 1887, the Palacio de Cristal originally hosted the Philippines Exposition, an exhibition meant to provide the Spanish public with a picture of life in the colonies [Figure 4.3]. In addition to showcasing flora and fauna from the Philippines, the exposition included over 50 native people brought from the colony to be exhibited in a human zoo.<sup>12</sup> Now a contemporary exhibition space

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<sup>10</sup> The Palacio de Cristal was based on the design of the Crystal Palace in London, England, which housed Britain's Great Exhibition of 1851. Designed to bolster support for imperial expansion and conquest, the Crystal Palace provided the blueprint for many of the expositions that emerged in Europe and the US during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. As Paul Greenhalgh describes, "From 1851 to 1940 then, commitment to empire at exhibitions never slackened or lost its fervour...Exhibitions became a propaganda ground for imperial justification, attempting to reinforce the unity of empire and to imbue the British public with an imperial pride" (Paul Greenhalgh, *Ephemeral Vistas* [Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988], 59). For a detailed history of the Great Exhibition of 1851 see, Nikolaus Pevsner, *High Victorian Design: A Study of the Exhibits of 1851* (London: Faber, 2011).

<sup>11</sup> On museums and empire, see especially Edward Said's analysis of colonialism and the Orient in Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979). Said describes the ways in which Western institutions, including museums, created an image of the orient "based more or less exclusively upon a sovereign Western consciousness out of whose unchallenged centrality an Oriental world emerged, first according to general ideas about who or what was an Oriental, then according to a detailed logic governed not simply by empirical reality but by a battery of desires, repressions, investments. and projections" (8). See also, John M. MacKenzie, *Museums and Empire: Natural History, Human Cultures and Colonial Identities* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009); Sarah Longair and John McAleer, *Curating Empire: Museums and the British Imperial Experience* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012); T. J. Barringer and Tom Flynn, *Colonialism and the Object: Empire, Material Culture and the Museum* (New York: Routledge, 2020).

<sup>12</sup> Luis Angel Sanchez Gomez, "Indigenous Art at the Philippine Exposition of 1887," *Journal of the History of Collections* 14, no. 2 (2002): 294. See also, Pascal Blanchard et al., *Human Zoos: Science and Spectacle in the Age of Colonial Empires* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2008). In their *Two Undiscovered Amerindians* project (1992-1993), contemporary artists Coco Fusco and Guillermo Gómez-Peña take aim at human zoos and the colonialist foundations of

run by the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Huyghe’s project reflected on the history of the site, foregrounding its inscription within the colonial desire to collect and classify the natural world through conquest. As Huyghe explained, “The Palacio de Cristal was built as a separated, acclimated world, an exhibition space for exotic plants brought back from a geographic elsewhere, the other side of the globe, the colonies, and maintained in the artificial climate of a glass house.”<sup>13</sup>

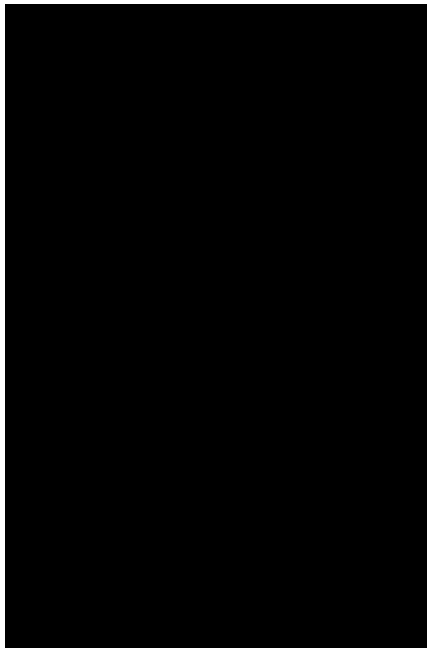


Figure 4.3 Illustration of the Philippine exposition, 1887.

Relating the “conquest of space” to the “conquest of time,” Huyghe divided the circular garden into twelve equal sections, each corresponding to a month of the year.<sup>14</sup> For each section, Huyghe included plants associated with the iconography of different holidays—pumpkins for Halloween, roses for Valentine’s Day, evergreen trees for Christmas, and so on. Reducing each

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anthropological museums, performing in a cage as members of a fictional undiscovered indigenous tribe. For a discussion of the project see Coco Fusco, “The Other History of Intercultural Performance,” *TDR* 38, no. 1 (Spring 1994): 143–67.

<sup>13</sup> Huyghe et al., *Pierre Huyghe (Lavigne)*, 150.

<sup>14</sup> Huyghe et al., 150.

holiday to a single symbol, Huyghe points to the ways in which commercial marketing has turned our customs and traditions into branded logos. As Huyghe explains, “Halloween is a commercial fiction...It is like four years old [in France]. We used to import products, and now we import traditions, invented traditions...Planting a custom is about setting up a stable repetition. It is a marketing strategy, and all you need is to fill the year with traditions, to create a permanent celebration.”<sup>15</sup> Huyghe undercuts the dominance of these symbols by using living flora, creating the possibility that the growing plants may corrupt one another. As Huyghe explains, the plants would eventually migrate beyond their initial sections, potentially producing new forms of life:

[It’s] a cultural ecosystem, a celebration lab. If a rose crosses with a pumpkin you have a potential new sign for a celebration; yet empty of meaning, here, something between the celebration of death and love...Signs, symbols or archetypes have an existence, they appear, disappear and at the same time I try to maintain that rhythm within a form of permanence. I am interested in the condition in which something arrived and I set these conditions which are constructed and fictional but again the relationship between these entities are real.<sup>16</sup>

How the plants might interact with one another remained open, meaning that all kinds of new celebrations might emerge from the project. Here, the real conditions of the garden produce a

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<sup>15</sup> Baker and Huyghe, “An Interview with Pierre Huyghe,” 87.

<sup>16</sup> Allard van Hoorn, “Pierre Huyghe: The Moment of Suspension,” *Domus*, October 18, 2011, <https://www.domusweb.it/en/art/2011/10/18/pierre-huyghe-the-moment-of-suspension.html>. Relying on the unpredictable behavior of plants, Huyghe’s project bares similarities to Hans Haacke’s *Der Bevölkerung*, a garden planted in the courtyard of the German Reichstag building in 2000. Haacke invited members of the Bundestag to add soil taken from their constituencies to the garden, explaining, “Naturally, seeds and roots from the places of origin are embedded in the soil brought to Berlin. They will sprout, as will airborne seeds from Berlin. They are to develop freely, without any tending.” (Hans Haacke, “Der Bevölkerung (Fig. 1),” *Oxford Art Journal* 24, no. 2 [2001]: 139).

new kind of fiction, opening the possibility that a hybrid plant might become the symbol for a holiday that does not yet exist.<sup>17</sup>

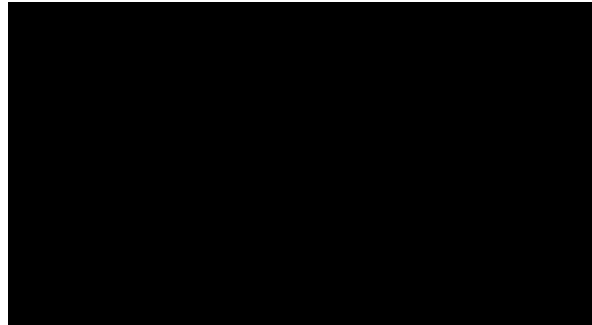


Figure 4.4. Pierre Huyghe, *Zoodram 1*, 2010, live marine ecosystem, glass tank, filtration system.

### *Biological Fictions*

In 2009, Huyghe began creating the *Zoodram* works—aquariums filled with marine animals, plant life, and minerals [Figure 4.4]. These aquatic habitats recall the influence of artists such as Hans Haacke, who began to incorporate living organisms in his works in the late-1960s.<sup>18</sup> In works such as *Chickens Hatching* (1969) and *Rhine Water Purification Plant* (1972), Haacke employed natural systems as a way of removing expressive authorial intent from the

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<sup>17</sup> The work eventually found a permanent location in the sculpture garden of the Kröller-Müller Museum in Otterlo, Netherlands, planting living organisms ensured that the work would continue to expand and contract according to the cyclical rhythms of growth and decay.

<sup>18</sup> A number of authors have connected Huyghe’s work with Hans Haacke, Benjamin Buchloh argues, “While for Haacke systems theory could still marshal a critical and rationalist Enlightenment culture in order to displace transhistorical artistic myths by positivist truth value, Huyghe’s dystopian displays of interconnected social, biological, and physical systems appear as the technologically mediated stages on which the imminent relapse of enlightenment into myth and ecological catastrophe can be most dramatically performed.” Buchloh, “Rock Paper Scissors,” 285. See also: Sven Lütticken, “Abstract Habitats: Installations of Coexistence and Coevolution,” *Grey Room* 59 (Spring 2015): 102–27; Skrebowski, “On Pierre Huyghe’s UUmweltanschauung”; Rottmann, “The Medium Is Leaking.”

work of art [Figure 4.5]. For Haacke, biological organisms offered a way beyond the illusionism of painting and sculpture, “Although my interest and later on the interest of an art-oriented public in such processes was culturally determined. The processes themselves did not share the mythical character of art and were not affected by what was read into them. They were subject only to the laws of nature.”<sup>19</sup> Haacke’s biological works tended toward the documentarian, providing scientific analysis of real-time systems. In contrast, Huyghe investigates the space in-between nature and fiction, the artist describes, “*Zoodram* is neither the reproduction of a naturalist ecosystem nor a set, but a world in itself where the conditions are constructed, yet what unfolds remains uncertain.”<sup>20</sup> Blending biological elements with cultural artifacts, Huyghe creates a shifting network of relations, as each node reforms the network as a whole.



Figure 4.5 Hans Haacke, *Rhine Water Purification Plant*, 1972, glass and acrylic containers, pump, polluted Rhine water, tubing, filters, chemicals, and goldfish.

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<sup>19</sup> Hans Haacke, “Provisional Remarks,” in *Institutional Critique: An Anthology of Artists’ Writings*, ed. Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2009), 121. Haacke’s real-time systems were developed in close dialogue with critic and curator Jack Burnham, who coined the term “systems aesthetics” to describe a shift “away from art objects” to works concerned with “natural and man-made systems, processes, [and] ecological relationships” Jack Burnham, “Notes on Art and Information Processing,” in *Software* (New York: The Jewish Museum, 1970), 10.

<sup>20</sup> Huyghe et al., *Pierre Huyghe (Lavigne)*, 174.

Isolated from the gallery space by panes of glass, the *Zoodrams* harken back to the carefully manicured arrangements of vegetation and animal life popularized during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The first self-sustaining aquariums were created during the 1850s, enabled by scientific research into how to sustain the vital functions of organisms by combining plant and marine life.<sup>21</sup> Aquariums became important tools for scientific research, allowing for the study of organisms in an approximation of their natural habitat or milieu. In her discussion of the aquarium's origins, Christina Wessely has argued that the devices were integral to developments in biological science, "The aquarium is useful to think with. The necessary reduction of complexity, which the scientist accomplishes with the transfer of the sea into a glass cuboid, results in an increased understanding of complex relationships; the specific materiality of the research apparatus opens up new, hitherto unformulated research questions that go far beyond the originally central epistemic objects."<sup>22</sup> The glass aquarium provided the necessary separation between researcher and subject, enclosing a miniature ecosystem over which the scientists could assume mastery. Huyghe connects this sense of mastery to the museum, another site where humans are traditionally separated from their object of study, he describes, "The aquarium is a

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<sup>21</sup> While research and experimentation with self-contained animal and plant aquariums dates back at least to the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the aquarium movement gained momentum in the 1840s, following the publication of studies by Robert S. Warington and Philip Henry Gosse, which detailed the science necessary for self-sustaining aquariums. The first public aquarium was installed in the zoological gardens in London's Regent's Park in 1852. In 1856, P.T. Barnum established the first American aquarium as part of Barnum's American Museum in New York City. In the latter-half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, public aquariums were established in major European cities, including Paris (1860), Vienna (1860), Berlin (1869), and Amsterdam (1882). On the history of aquariums see Christopher Hamlin, "Robert Warington and the Moral Economy of the Aquarium," *Journal of the History of Biology* 19, no. 1 (1986): 131–53; Philip Rehbock, "The Victorian Aquarium in Ecological and Social Perspective," in *Oceanography: The Past* (New York: Springer-Verlag, 1980), 522–39.

<sup>22</sup> Christina Wessely, "Watery Milieus: Marine Biology, Aquariums, and the Limits of Ecological Knowledge circa 1900," trans. Nathan Stobaugh, *Grey Room*, no. 75 (May 1, 2019): 38.

place of separation, normally a collection of different species of different places around the world that are gathered together in a system supposed to be in nature, similar to a museum. I am interested in the strange relationship and separation between the human and a world.”<sup>23</sup> For Huyghe, the aquarium and the museum represent instruments of rationalization, systems of separation that allow for the collection, containment, and categorization of the world at large.<sup>24</sup> The artist makes this connection explicit by incorporating direct references to artworks into his aquatic dioramas. *Zoodram 4* consists of a rectangular tank filled with red volcanic rocks and a live hermit crab [Figure 4.6]. Huyghe introduced a plastic replica of Constantin Brâncuși’s *Sleeping Muse* to the tank, placing the hermit crab into contact with Brancusi’s iconic sculpture.<sup>25</sup> While the crab’s behavior could not be entirely predetermined, Huyghe set up conditions that guided the creature to follow its instincts and adopt the sculpture as a shelter. We can imagine the hermit crab performing the same sequence of actions repeatedly, like an animatronic in an amusement park display. Put into the context of the contemporary art museum,

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<sup>23</sup> van Hoorn, “Pierre Huyghe.”

<sup>24</sup> While drawing on these systems of classification, art and organism collide in Huyghe’s work, helping to breakdown strict categorical distinctions. In this respect, Huyghe’s aquariums draw upon earlier modes of display, like the cabinets of curiosity established in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, characterized by a “baroque oral-visual polymathy” that differed from the “Enlightenment classifying culture, or rational systematics” embraced by 19<sup>th</sup> century museum displays. (Barbara Maria Stafford, *Artful Science: Enlightenment Entertainment and the Eclipse of Visual Education* [Cambridge, MA.: The MIT Press, 1999], 218).

<sup>25</sup> Huyghe’s aquariums often make explicit reference to works of art; for instance, a series of freshwater tanks titled *Nymphéas Transplant*, revolves around the ecosystems of the ponds in Claude Monet’s gardens in Giverny, France. These murky green habitats incorporated species that would have been found in Monet’s ponds, including water lily plants, ide fish, axolotls, and a variety of crustaceans. Referencing Monet’s tendency to paint the same subject under different light conditions, Huyghe used historical climatic data from 1914 to 1918 in Giverny to program an 8-hour lighting sequence for the aquarium. A choreographed play of diffused lighting effects, the resulting piece is as imagistic as it is biological. For more on Claude Monet’s gardens at Giverny, see Claire Joyes, *Monet at Giverny* (New York: Vendome Press, 1975); George T. M. Shackelford et al., *Monet: The Late Years* (Fort Worth, TX: Kimbell Art Museum, 2019).

Huyghe's allegory of art encounter suggests that human audiences might experience a similar fate, guided by the experience economy's scripted scenarios and doomed to play out the same sequence of actions over and over again.

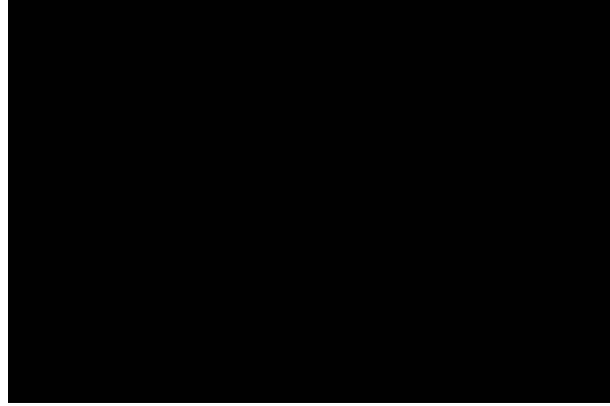


Figure 4.6. Pierre Huyghe, *Zoodram 4*, 2011, living marine ecosystem, aquarium, filtration system, resin mask.

### *Rite Passage*

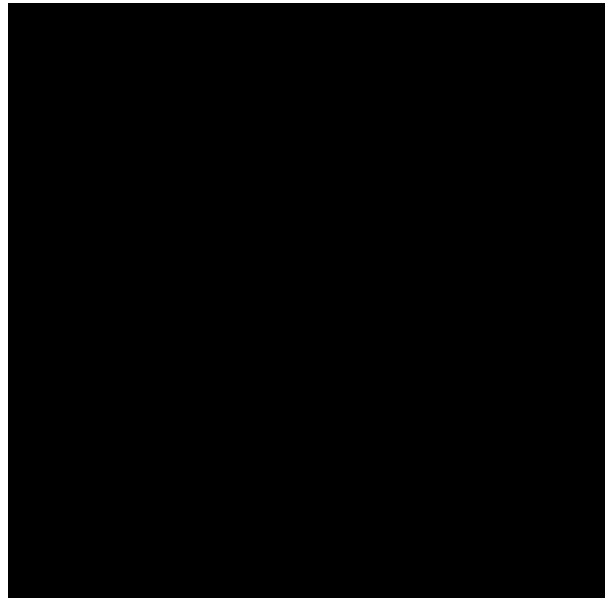


Figure 4.7. Pierre Huyghe, *Rite Passage*, 2015, installation view, Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Expanding into entire environments—terraces, gardens, and parks—allowed Huyghe to explore the porous flow between fiction and biological fact. Huyghe continued to explore the context of the zoological garden in subsequent projects such as *Rite Passage*, his 2015

commission for the Roof Garden at the Metropolitan Museum of Art [Figure 4.7]. For this project, Huyghe engaged with the history of the museum, which overlooks Central Park. The initial plans for the site included a Paleozoic Museum that would display life-sized models of dinosaurs in a glass pavilion, which was to be designed by Benjamin Waterhouse Hawkins, the creator of the popular dinosaur garden for London's Crystal Palace [Figure 4.8].<sup>26</sup> Ultimately, the plans were scrapped, Hawkins models were destroyed and, according to legend, buried somewhere nearby in the park.<sup>27</sup> After the project was abandoned, the plots of land in Central Park were granted to the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the American Museum of Natural History, institutions with origins rooted in 19<sup>th</sup>-century global exploration and colonial expansion and driven by the era's desire to scientifically catalogue and display the wonders of world.<sup>28</sup> When Huyghe began working on his commission, he initially hoped that he might find remnants of the models interred in the grounds surrounding the museums.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> *Thirteenth Annual Report of the Board of Commissioners of the Central Park.*, vol. 13 (New York: Board of Commissioners of the Central Park, 1869), 27. On the history of the Paleozoic Museum, see also Edwin H. Colbert and Katharine Beneker, "The Paleozoic Museum in Central Park, or the Museum That Never Was," *Curator: The Museum Journal* 2, no. 2 (1959): 137–50.

<sup>27</sup> "The Scientific Value of the Central Park," *Scientific American* 24, no. 6 (1871): 88.

In 1870, park plans were disrupted when the Democratic Party machine politician Boss Tweed replaced the independent Board of Commissioners with the newly created New York City Department of Public Parks. Peter B. Sweeny, the new commissioner, fired Frederick Law Olmsted and his team. Tweed and Sweeny were later found to be embezzling millions of dollars from the park funds. (Morrison Heckscher, *Creating Central Park* [New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2008], 66).

<sup>28</sup> For an excellent analysis of the display practices of the American Museum of Natural History, see Donna Haraway, "Teddy Bear Patriarchy: Taxidermy in the Garden of Eden, New York City, 1908-36," *Social Text* 11 (Winter 1984): 19–64. Haraway describes how the "Age of Man" was rooted in the politics of eugenics and presented an origin story for man that effectively erased Africa (Haraway, 21).

<sup>29</sup> Ian Alteveer, "Vestiges in the Rocks: Pierre Huyghe's Mineral Garden," in *The Roof Garden Commission: Pierre Huyghe*, ed. Ian Alteveer and Meredith Brown (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2015), 12.

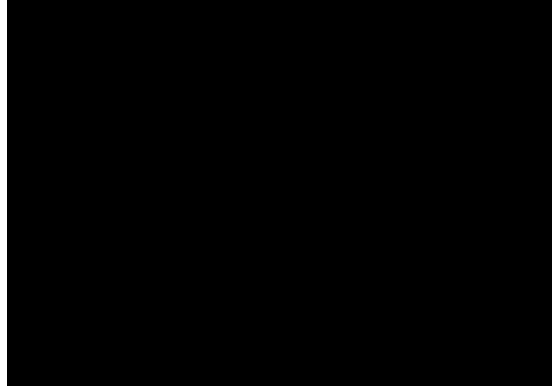


Figure 4.8. Illustration of the proposed Paleozoic Museum in Central Park, *Thirteenth Annual report of the Board of Commissioners of the Central Park*, 1869.

Huyghe also drew inspiration from the Copper Man, a mummified sixth-century miner found in Chile, now in the collection of the American Museum of Natural History [Figure 4.9].<sup>30</sup> Encrusted with layers of copper salts, the petrified miner was perfectly preserved by the products of his own labor. For Huyghe, the story of the Copper Man functioned as an analogue to the museum's own function as an instrument for fossilizing the past, the artist explains, "A man became 'fossilized' within the site where he was working...The miner was mineralized by his context and also recorded it, in a kind of pseudomorphism...So, not only am I looking at the resources, material or not, that are already present here and how the museum itself is a mine of natural matter and epistemic, cultural material, but also how it is a site of influence on behavior or even at a cellular level."<sup>31</sup> While working within the crystalizing framework of museum display, Huyghe hoped that introducing living animals to his vitrines can help break away from the normal rhythm of museum exhibitions:

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<sup>30</sup> See Junius B. Bird, "The 'Copper Man': A Prehistoric Miner and His Tools from Northern Chile," in *Pre-Columbian Metallurgy of South America*, ed. Elizabeth P. Benson (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library, 1979), 105–32.

<sup>31</sup> Sheena Wagstaff, "A Conversation with Pierre Huyghe," in *The Roof Garden Commission: Pierre Huyghe*, ed. Ian Alteveer and Meredith Brown (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2015), 23.

I am looking for a ritual other than that of the exhibition as it has been constructed since the nineteenth century; it is instead a ritual made out of the rhythmic of auto emergences, events with variations, accelerations. It is an evolving organism, generating itself in a continuous, ever-changing transformation, whether biological (with instinctive behaviors) or mechanistic (driven by algorithms, with encoded living presence and process).<sup>32</sup>

The Met project included *Cambrian Pulse*—a large freshwater aquarium installed in a corner of the museum’s paved rooftop. Inside the tank, several marine animals—tadpole shrimp and lampreys—navigated around a large volcanic rock that hovered near the surface of the water. As Huyghe describes, the species are known as “living fossils,” organisms that are nearly identical to fossilized specimens from millions of years ago, meaning that the modern creatures have remained virtually unchanged over millennia.<sup>33</sup> Despite their genetic fixity, the animals are important actors in the transformation of the tank as they transport and disperse stones and sand. Further challenging the fixity of these fossilized records, streams of water slowly trickled from the tank, seeping into the paver stones below. As Huyghe describes, “The aquarium leaks, and the living diorama flows outward. The water sinks under the tiles, creating a stream that releases biological life and oxidizes other elements as it flows through the building to the sewer.”<sup>34</sup> We might think of the “leak” as the organizing principle for Huyghe’s work more generally, a way to direct attention beyond the confines of the aquarium. As Huyghe explains, “From the aquarium, you follow the cause of the leak, under the tiles, through the roof to the drain and its circulation through the building. I generally avoid objects that you can move around for an instant view or effect. I prefer a situation that you have to navigate, that you cannot see or encounter all at once, that exists, yet is not always visible.”<sup>35</sup> In other works, leaking has functioned more obliquely, a

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<sup>32</sup> Wagstaff, 33.

<sup>33</sup> Wagstaff, 29.

<sup>34</sup> Wagstaff, 29.

<sup>35</sup> Wagstaff, 30.

means for expanding outward from the artwork to engage with broader cultural, historical, and technological frameworks. As I discuss below, the complex ecologies of *Untilled* and *After A Life Ahead* engage a porous web of associations, including references to 19<sup>th</sup> century literature, art history, gardening, and biotechnology.

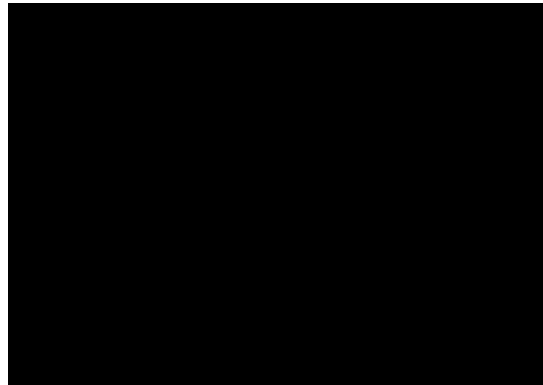


Figure 4.9 Copper Man, Pan-American Exposition, Buffalo, New York, 1901.

### *Neoliberalism, Biopolitics, Experience Economy*

This chapter takes as its point of departure the fundamental transformation of experience under neoliberalism. I pay special attention to a loose series of effects united under the concept of biopolitics—a term introduced by Michel Foucault to describe the ways in which power manages, administers, and optimizes life. In *The Birth of Biopolitics*, Foucault describes how neoliberalism marks an era when the biological and life itself are managed—to unprecedented degree—according to the “grid of economic intelligibility.”<sup>36</sup> Foucault charts the transition from

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<sup>36</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978-79*, trans. Michel Senellart (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 248. Elaborating on the wide-reaching effects of neoliberalism’s economization of life, theorist David Harvey describes that, “sickness (or any kind of pathology) gets defined within this circulation process as an inability to go to work, inability to perform adequately within the circulation of variable capital (to produce surplus value), or to abide by its disciplinary rules.” David Harvey, *Spaces of Hope* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 106.

a disciplinary society, in which a sovereign power makes decisions over life or death, to a more pervasive and diffuse form of biopower. He explains, “Power would no longer be dealing simply with legal subjects over whom the ultimate dominion was death, but with living beings, and the mastery it would be able to exercise over them would have to be applied at the level of life itself; it was the taking charge of life, more than the threat of death, that gave power its access even to the body.”<sup>37</sup> If disciplinary power controlled life through state decree, in the form of executions, pardons, and the like, biopower reshapes sovereignty into a dispersed technology for managing living, a means for compelling life to endure according to certain regulatory norms. Thus, there emerged a “*biopolitics* of population,” under which individuals, extrapolated into populations, became intelligible as a set of data points centered around “propagation, births and mortality, the level of health, life expectancy and longevity.”<sup>38</sup> Under the regime of biopower, life is permissible insofar as it can be measured and optimized, “Such a power has to qualify, measure, appraise, and hierarchize, rather than display itself in its murderous splendor; it does not have to draw the line that separates the enemies of the sovereign from his obedient subjects; it effects distributions around the norm,” Foucault explains.<sup>39</sup> Within biopolitics, what constitutes *living* is increasingly defined through the management, discipline, and calibration of populations, rather than individual bodies; “the law operates more and more as a norm...the judicial institution is increasingly incorporated into a continuum of apparatuses (medical, administrative, and so on) whose functions are for the most part regulatory. A normalizing society is the historical outcome of a technology of power centered on life.”<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon, 1978), 142–43.

<sup>38</sup> Foucault, 139 (original emphasis).

<sup>39</sup> Foucault, 144.

<sup>40</sup> Foucault, 144.

As museums embrace aspects of the experience economy, their relationship to audiences increasingly reflects a biopolitical logic.<sup>41</sup> This approach finds expression in the desire to maximize emotional intensity, now a default directive for museums.<sup>42</sup> Oftentimes, the experience in question is calibrated according to a statistical norm, the “average viewer” whose characteristics are bolstered by audience surveys, demographic data, and attendance numbers.<sup>43</sup> We also see this notion of a regulatory norm reflected in Huyghe’s desire to move outside of the exhibition format, he stated, “Exhibitions revolve more and more around the need to address a target public. A museum’s education department needs visitors to understand, otherwise they

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<sup>41</sup> The museum’s approach to the audience as a generalized population reflects the broader transformation of power under biopolitics, from the disciplinary regulation of individual bodies to structures that operate at the level of entire populations. As Michel Foucault describes, “The new technology being established is addressed to a multiplicity of men, not to the extent that they are nothing more than their individual bodies, but to the extent that they form, on the contrary, a global mass that is affected by overall processes characteristic of birth, death, production, illness, and so on. So after a first seizure of power over the body in an individualizing mode, we have a second seizure of power that is not individualizing but, if you like, massifying.” Michel Foucault, “17 March 1976,” in *Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975–76*, ed. Mauro Bertani and Alessandro Fontana, trans. David Macey (New York: Picador, 1997), 242–43.)

<sup>42</sup> There is a corpus of management literature on the experience economy in museums, see for example: James H. Gilmore and B. Joseph Pine, “Museums and Authenticity,” *Museum News*, June 2007, 76–80, 92–93; Stephanie Weaver, *Creating Great Visitor Experiences: A Guide for Museums, Parks, Zoos, Gardens & Libraries* (Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, 2016); Arnold Vermeeren, Licia Calvi, and Amalia Sabiescu, *Museum Experience Design: Crowds, Ecosystems and Novel Technologies* (New York: Springer, 2018); Mark Walhimer, *Designing Museum Experiences* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2021).

<sup>43</sup> Underlying assumptions about the average viewer can also reflect disturbing institutional biases, see for example the recent job description posted by the Indianapolis Museum of Art, which listed “maintaining the Museum’s traditional, core, white art audience” as one of the candidate’s key responsibilities. See Associated Press, “Indianapolis Museum Apologizes for Job Listing Citing ‘white Art Audience,’” *The Guardian*, February 14, 2021, sec. US news, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2021/feb/14/indianapolis-museum-of-art-at-newfields-white-art-audience-job-listing>; Valentina Di Liscia, “1,500+ Call for Museum President’s Removal After Job Posting Cites ‘Core, White Art Audience,’” *Hyperallergic*, February 16, 2021, <http://hyperallergic.com/622418/indianapolis-call-for-museum-presidents-removal-job-posting-white-art-audience/>.

won't be happy and won't come back...I don't want to exhibit something to someone anymore. I want to do the reverse: I want to exhibit someone to something.”<sup>44</sup> As Huyghe describes it, the exhibition has become its own kind of affect-producing machine. The museum attempts to optimize visitors' happiness, hoping to entice them to return. In this sense, the experience of art mimes the logic of the experience economy, transforming one's subjectivity into a product to consume, in the form of memories and emotional intensities.

Recall that, within the experience economy, product offerings take place on the level of one's "state of mind." B. Joseph Pine and James H. Gilmore describe:

While prior economic offerings—commodities, goods, and services—are external to the buyer, experiences are inherently personal, existing only in the mind of an individual who has been engaged on an emotional, physical, intellectual, or even spiritual level. Thus, no two people can have the same experience, because each experience derives from the interaction between the staged event (like a theatrical play) and the individual's state of mind.<sup>45</sup>

As Pine and Gilmore argue, the most successful offerings generate transformative experiences that bring about affective change in the consumer, "Transformations, being the fifth and final economic offering in the progression of economic value, occur when companies use experiences—as in the phrase 'life-transforming experiences'—to guide customers to change.”<sup>46</sup>

Affective transformation is particularly important for museums, which must overcome the public's perception of inauthenticity:

All museums, therefore—as with all businesses—are fake, fake, fake...Experience happens inside of us. That is why museums should focus on creating the *perception* of authenticity in the minds of people...Museums can render themselves,

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<sup>44</sup> Julia Michalska, "Pierre Huyghe Creates a Buzz in Paris," *The Art Newspaper*, September 23, 2013, <http://www.theartnewspaper.com/articles/Pierre-Huyghe-creates-a-buzz-in-Paris/30305>.

<sup>45</sup> Gilmore and Pine, "Welcome to the Experience Economy," 99.

<sup>46</sup> James H. Gilmore and B. Joseph Pine, "Using Art to Render Authenticity in Business," in *Beyond Experience: Culture, Consumer & Brand*, Arts & Business (London: Arts & Business, 2009), 17.

phenomenologically, as authentic. And since authenticity is becoming the new consumer sensibility, museums *must* do so, and do so with intention.<sup>47</sup>

Essentially, the experience economy monetizes sense perceptions, inviting participants to pay an admission fee to consume their own affects.<sup>48</sup> In short, consumer and product are one and the same. A particularly egregious example of this phenomenon can be found in the 2014 exhibition *Boston Loves Impressionism* at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Rather than curating a selection of works, the institution crowdsourced the exhibition, encouraging members of the public to “Share the Love” by voting for their favorite works online.<sup>49</sup> Opening to the public on Valentine’s Day, the exhibition’s descriptive text equated voting and loving:

Voters made plain their love for Vincent van Gogh’s masterpiece, *Houses at Auvers* (1890), which earned the most votes (4,464), edging out Claude Monet, who came in second place with 3,543 votes for his iconic *Water Lilies* (1907). Third place was taken by Edgar Degas’ *Little Fourteen-Year-Old Dancer* (original model 1878–81, cast after 1921)—the only sculpture in the contest. These three top vote getters hold a place of honor at the entrance of the exhibition. Come see the exhibition that you helped to create.<sup>50</sup>

Thus, in a near perfect replication of neoliberal logic, the MFA transformed into a museum of consumer choice. With choice recast through marketing as “love,” visitors were essentially told in advance the kind of affective response they could expect to have in the galleries.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Gilmore and Pine, “Museums and Authenticity,” 78–79.

<sup>48</sup> Sensory stimuli are crucial to the formation of authenticity; Pine and Gilmore urge businesses to “Engage all five senses. The sensory stimulants that accompany an experience should support and enhance its theme.” (Gilmore and Pine, “Welcome to the Experience Economy,” 104).

<sup>49</sup> “Publicity Circular for ‘Boston Loves Impressionism,’” 2014; reprinted in Alexis L. Boylan, “What’s Love Got to Do with It? Crowdsourcing, Curating and Love in the Neoliberal Museum,” *Journal of Curatorial Studies* 4, no. 3 (2015): 392.

<sup>50</sup> “Boston Loves Impressionism,” Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, accessed April 13, 2022, <https://www.mfa.org/exhibitions/boston-loves-impressionism>.

<sup>51</sup> For an extended analysis of the exhibition see Boylan, “What’s Love Got to Do with It? Crowdsourcing, Curating and Love in the Neoliberal Museum.” In particular, Boylan criticizes how the MFA recast love in explicitly heteronormative terms.

Huyghe's attempts to "exhibit someone to something," dramatize the consumption of affect in a corrupted form. When Huyghe began to incorporate live plants and animals in his work, he hoped to destabilize the experiential framework of the typical exhibition. He explains, "There's something that's left to its own evolution, which has the ability to modify by itself. A place where un-useful things are dropped without any concern for display, not a place someone composed, in the usual sense of making a decision to place certain things in relation to others according to different protocols, parameters, narratives or semantic correlations, usually encountered in exhibitions. Here, the living endlessly operate the exhibition."<sup>52</sup> For Huyghe, challenging the exhibition framework also means complicating the notion of an 'intended' audience for his experiences:

I am referring more to the coming into sight of things which are indifferent to the 'for us', with moments where they exist, shift away from our sight, and moments of emergence. To come back to biological life for instance, Adolf Portman talks about self-presentation and appearance without any recipient in the animal world... The reason why all urban parks are so predictably boring in their programming is that they are 'intended for' an average. I thought that the problem was coming from the increasingly large public, but the problem is this destination: what the public should think and have.<sup>53</sup>

While Huyghe transforms participants into consumable objects, his work resists the self-cannibalizing impulse of the experience economy, suggesting that something—a rising water table, an insect's life cycle, or a sprouting poisonous plant—might consume the spectator instead.

In what follows, I want to suggest that Huyghe's work fosters novel temporal relationships that challenge the notion of the experience as typically formulated in the museum. While working within the framework of interactivity, Huyghe creates works that are indifferent

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<sup>52</sup> Pierre Huyghe and Hans Ulrich Obrist, "Conversation," in *Pierre Huyghe (Serpentine)* (London: Serpentine Galleries, 2019), 183.

<sup>53</sup> Chiambaretta, Huyghe, and Troncy, "Living Systems."

to human subjects, withholding overly meaningful forms of participation. In doing so, Huyghe fosters forms of ordinariness more attuned to the temporalities of persistence, maintenance, and living on. As Huyghe develops systems that persist, rather than thrive, his works reflect on the condition of living under biopolitics, wherein the spectacular scene of death as crisis or catastrophe, emblemized by the executioner's block, gives way to scenes of ordinariness, forms of "ongoingness, getting by, and living on."<sup>54</sup> In Huyghe, we encounter those forms of "slow death" that the theorist Lauren Berlant correlates with the "physical wearing out of a population."<sup>55</sup> In aggregate, biopolitical populations can tolerate certain endemic forms of death, regarded as "permanent factors which...sapped the population's strength, shortened the working week, wasted energy, and cost money."<sup>56</sup> As Foucault explains, "Death was no longer something that swooped down on life—as in an epidemic. Death was now something permanent, something that slips into life, perpetually gnaws at it, diminishes it and weakens it."<sup>57</sup> Following Foucault, Berlant describes slow death as "a condition of being worn out by the activity of reproducing life."<sup>58</sup> As such, the concept of slow death focuses attention on the forms of biopower that reside in the ordinary aspects of living on:

Without attending to the varieties and constraint and unconsciousness that condition ordinary activity, we persist in an attachment to a fantasy that in the truly lived life emotions are always heightened and expressed in modes of effective agency that ought justly to be and are ultimately consequential or performatively sovereign... To counter the moral science of biopolitics, which links the political administration of life to the melodrama of the care of the monadic self, we need to think about agency and personhood not only in inflated terms but also as an activity exercised within spaces of ordinariness that does not always or even usually follow the literalizing logic of visible effectuality, bourgeois dramatics, and lifelong accumulation of self-fashioning.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 99.

<sup>55</sup> Berlant, 95.

<sup>56</sup> Foucault, "17 March 1976," 243–44.

<sup>57</sup> Foucault, 244.

<sup>58</sup> Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 100.

<sup>59</sup> Berlant, 99.

In other words, in contrast to the heightened emotion of biopolitical spectacle, we might locate political agency in the ordinary and everyday forms of exhausting, wearing away, but keeping on, in spite of. Rather than crisis or epiphany, slow death is captured by a sense of ongoingness that we also find in the extended temporal protocols of Huyghe's exhibitions.

In Huyghe's work, we encounter slow death through bodies that fail to thrive according to biopolitical rationality. Against the optimized life exemplified by the entrepreneurial self, Huyghe mobilizes the living in hybrid, abject, or corrupted forms. In *Untilled*, the position of the spectator finds its mirror in the undead, reanimated, or zombified creature, providing a foil to neoliberalism's fantasy of biopolitical perfection. Hovering between life and death, the undead represents a potent allegory for the state of existence defined by neoliberalism and global capitalism—at various times standing in for the postindustrial worker whose affect is rendered into an economic offering; the failure to thrive under precarious economies; the mindless consumerism of advanced capitalism; or the uncertain legal status conferred to migrant populations. The threshold between living and dead established in *Untilled* is not only a formal strategy, a means for relating unlike concepts or ideas, but marks a fundamental challenge to the experiential atmosphere of the exhibition. Specifically, Huyghe mobilizes the figure of the undead to undermine the logic of the exhibition, the conventions of the experience economy, and the understanding of life in neoliberalism's biopolitical regime. Here, the living dead represents the refusal of the biopolitical desire to "let live." In this sense, Huyghe's project functions like a *memento mori*—not to remind of death, but to remind us that lived experience can be turned into a dead thing, into an image. This chapter considers slow death in relation to *Untilled* and *After A Life Ahead*, projects that locate forms of ongoingness that run counter to the spectacularity of the experiential exhibition.

*Untilled*

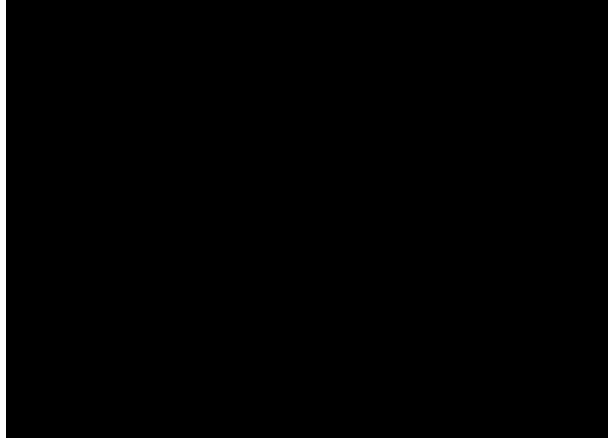


Figure 4.10. Pierre Huyghe, *A Way in Untilled*, 2012, HD video (color, sound), video still.

In 2012, Pierre Huyghe exhibited *Untilled*, a living and breathing bioscape located in a compost heap in Kassel, Germany [Figure 4.10]. Situated on the edges of Karlsaue park, the off-the-beaten-path lot, overgrown with plants and weeds, gave the impression that the site had been abandoned. Rather than carefully composed, the various elements of the work appeared to be randomly scattered throughout the area. As Huyghe explained, “The compost is the place where you throw things that you don’t need or that are dead, I used the same methodology for *Untilled*, using personally important markers and dropping them within that place.”<sup>60</sup> Huyghe populated the environment with sculptures, plants, mammals, insects, and topological formations. Many of these elements were explicitly art historical: an uprooted oak tree from Joseph Beuys’ *7000 Eichen* (1982), a work for documenta 7 that planted seven thousand oaks throughout the city of Kassel, Germany [Figure 4.11]; a replica of a reclining nude statue by Max Weber from the 1930s was altered by an active bee hive that encased its head [Figure 4.12]; evergreen trees

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<sup>60</sup> Quoted in Christopher Mooney, “Pierre Huyghe,” *Art Review*, October 2013, 97.

hinted at Marcel Duchamp's *Etant Donnés* (1946–1966) [Figure 4.13]; another fallen tree referred to Robert Smithson's *Dead Tree* (1969); and an upended bench resting between stone slabs restaged a portion of Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster's 2002 installation for documenta 11 [Figure 4.14].

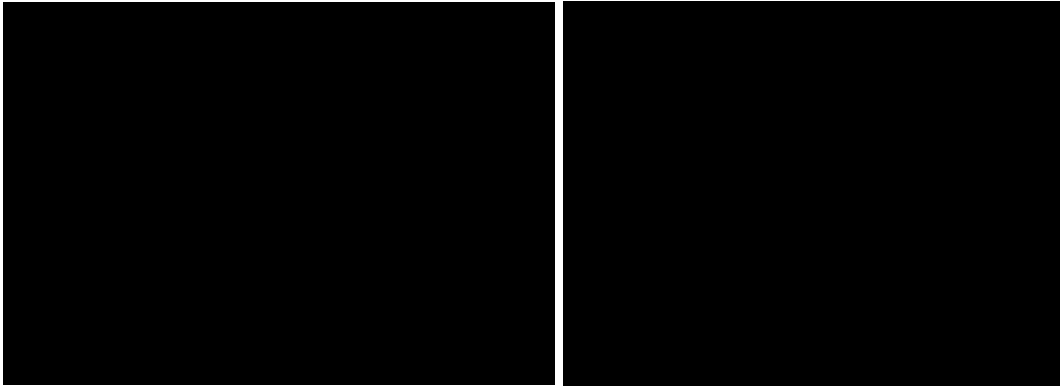


Figure 4.11 Pierre Huyghe, *A Way in Untilled*, 2012 and performance documentation of Joseph Beuys's *7000 Oaks*, 1982, documenta 7, Kassel, Germany, March 16, 1982.

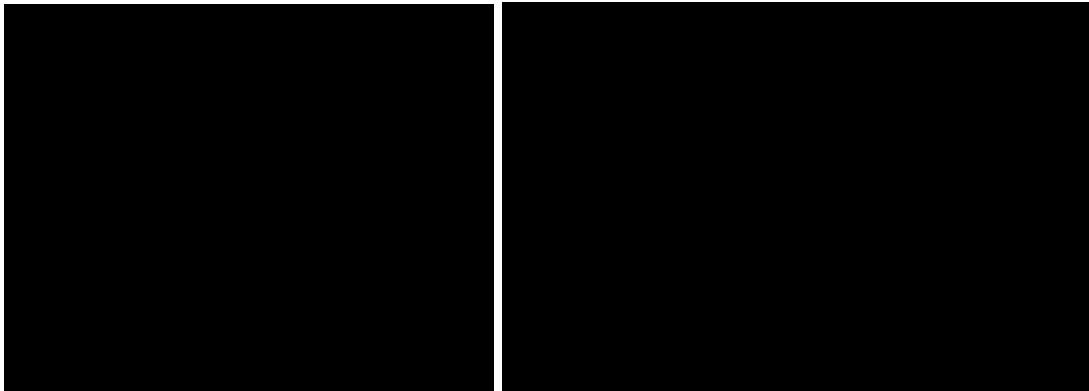


Figure 4.12. Pierre Huyghe, *Untilled (Liegender Frauenakt)*, 2012, concrete with beehive structure, wax, live bee colony and Max Weber, *Liegender Frauenakt*, 1930s, bronze.

Amid these references to various points of contact between art and nature, Huyghe populated the area with plants that harbored distinct chemical compositions: psychotropic plants, such as peyote, afghan poppy, and marijuana; poisonous plants, such as hemlock, devil's trumpets, and deadly nightshade; and various plants with supposed aphrodisiac properties. Colonies of bees were introduced to pollinate the plants and ant colonies were meant to spread

seeds around the landscape. Throughout the course of the installation, two *Podenco Ibicenco* dogs, each with a leg dyed pink, roamed through the environment [Figure 4.15].

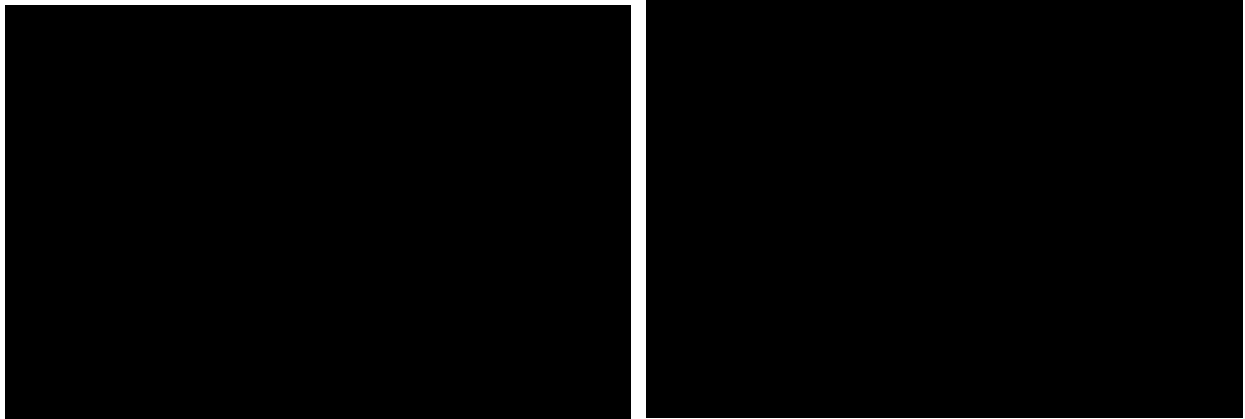


Figure 4.13. Left: Pierre Huyghe, *Untitled*, 2011–12 and Marcel Duchamp, Study for landscape backdrop of *Étant donnés*, 1959, cut gelatin silver prints over paper with paint, ink adhesive on plywood.

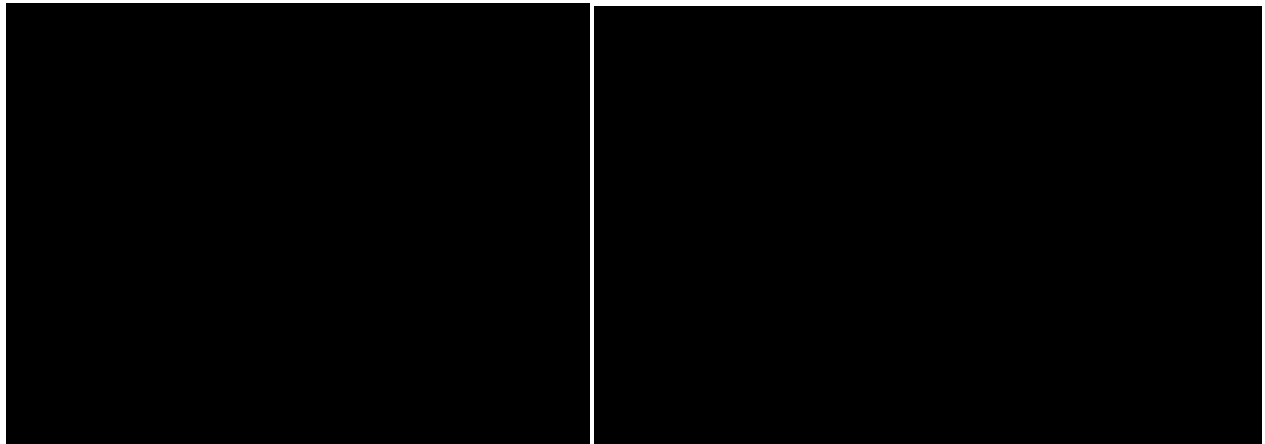


Figure 4.14. Pierre Huyghe, *Untitled*, 2011–12 and Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster, *Park—A Plan for Escape*, 2002, environment for documenta 11, Kassel, Germany.

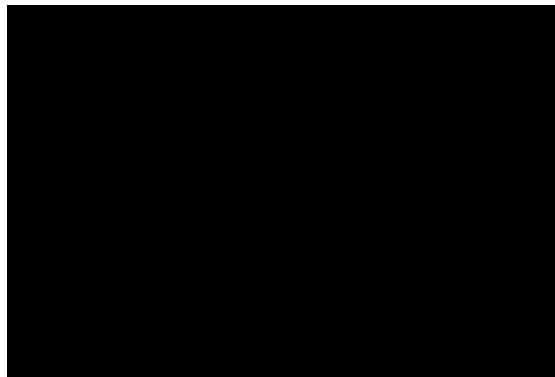


Figure 4.15. Pierre Huyghe, *Untitled*, 2011–12.

The dense network of biological processes assembled by Huyghe remained subject to transformations beyond his control and often invisible to the artist and visitors alike. For example, the bees reproduced causing the hive on the Max Weber sculpture to swell in size over the course of several months. The bees also helped to pollinate many of the plants allowing them to propagate. These processes remained in constant flux, cycling through growth and decay, formation and reformation, expansion, and contraction. This is precisely the dynamic that Huyghe hoped to foreground, the artist describes:

There are antagonisms, associations, hospitality and hostility, corruption, separation and degeneration or collapse with no encounters. There are circumstances and deviations that allow the emergence of complexities. There are rhythms, automatisms and accidents, invisible and continuous transformations, movements and process but no choreography; sonorities and resonances but no polyphony. There is repetition, chemical reaction, reproduction, formation, and vitality, but the existence of a system is uncertain. The roles are not distributed, there is no organization, no representation, no exhibition. There are rules but not a policy.<sup>61</sup>

These cycles happened irrespective of whether viewers were aware of them, making it difficult to discern exactly what constituted the exhibition. In doing so, Huyghe challenged the anthropocentricity of the exhibition, positioning the spectator as one among many interrelated signifiers.

### *Umwelt*

Huyghe's idea that his habitat might be part of documenta, but "no exhibition" takes inspiration from Jakob von Uexküll, an early twentieth century biologist who developed the concept of *Umwelt*. Uexküll argued that each living being, guided by its unique perceptual

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<sup>61</sup> Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, ed., *Documenta 13: The Guidebook*, vol. Catalog 3/3 (Bonn: VG Bild-Kunst, 2012), 262.

faculties, assembles its own individual environment, or *Umwelt*. In *A Foray into the Worlds of Animals and Humans*, Uexküll explains:

The animal's environment [*Umwelt*]...is only a piece cut out of its surroundings, which we see stretching out on all sides around the animal—and these surroundings are nothing else but our own, human environment...Every subject spins out, like the spider's threads, its relations to certain qualities of things and weaves them into a solid web, which carries its existence.<sup>62</sup>

Any particular *Umwelt* consists of the sensory input that might cause an organism to react.

Ultrasound, for example, might guide how whales and bats navigate the world, but carries little significance for humans. Uexküll suggested that the world was comprised of a heterogenous assemblage of differently scaled *Umwelten*, meaningful perspectival worlds specific to the needs of each species. Uexküll's theory of the *Umwelt*, turns away from the human-centered worldview, making space for the distinct inner worlds of all lifeforms. Uexküll explains this concept through a series of illustrations that show how a human being, a dog, and a fly might view a room differently [Figure 4.16]. A human might view all furniture in the room as relevant: the bookshelf for reading, table for eating, sofa for sitting. A dog, however, might only register those areas it finds significant: spaces for sitting and eating, but not reading. For the fly, all areas of the room remain neutral until a meaningful stimulus appears—a pot of coffee and a warm piece of toast might lure the heat-sensitive creature to the breakfast table, for example.

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<sup>62</sup> Jakob von Uexküll, *A Foray into the Worlds of Animals and Humans: With a Theory of Meaning* (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 2010), 53.



Figure 4.16. Illustrations from Jakob von Uexküll's *A Foray into the Worlds of Animals and Humans*; from left to right: view of a human, dog, and fly.

Huyghe echoes Uexküll when he describes the relationship he hoped to establish with visitors to the site, “You don’t display things. You don’t make a *mise-en-scène*, you don’t design things, you just drop them. And when someone enters that site, things are in themselves, they don’t have a dependence on the person. They are indifferent to the public. You are in a place of indifference. Each thing, a bee, an ant, a plant, a rock, keeps growing or changing.”<sup>63</sup> In *Untilled*, microscopic processes gradually transformed the environment in often imperceptible ways—microbes decomposed organic matter, bacteria multiplied, and roots spread in a hidden network below the soil. The exhibition, as it appeared to human visitors, was only one *Umwelt* among many. Emphasizing this aspect in *Untilled*, Huyghe named the white dog with a pink leg *Human*, suggesting that the entire experience had been orchestrated for the creature’s benefit. Ironically, the dog functioned as such a potent image that it became almost a logo for *documenta* as a whole [Figure 4.17]. When prompted in an interview about this “marketing emblem,” Huyghe acknowledged that this was not his intention, “*Untilled* tried to overturn separation and categorisation but complexity can’t easily be transmitted, and the dog with the pink leg, whose name was *Human*, became a mediatic extractable sign. It wasn’t necessarily my intention. Some markers have greater intensity and hold more fictional quality.”<sup>64</sup> *Human* may have obscured

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<sup>63</sup> Mooney, “Pierre Huyghe,” 97.

<sup>64</sup> Huyghe and Obrist, “Conversation,” 183.

many of the fictions embedded in the project, including the layered references to art and literature that were likely to escape recognition from visitors. Here, Huyghe acknowledges the limits of his approach, to merely “drop things” in an unpredictable way requires that the artist gives up considerable control over the work. While the hope is that there will be enough complexity to prevent the reification of any single part of the installation, there is always the risk that aspects might coalesce into a symbol. As I discuss below, over the years, Huyghe’s projects have assumed greater and greater complexity, growing in ambition and scale in an attempt to stave off possible ossification.

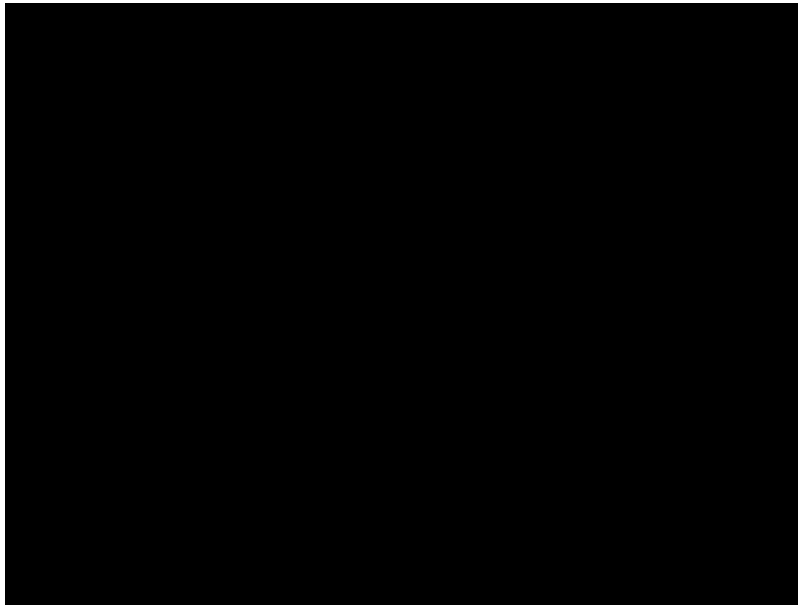


Figure 4.17. Pierre Huyghe, *Untitled*, 2011–12.

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Huyghe’s embrace of fictional *Umwelten* draws from the theorist Giorgio Agamben, a frequent reference point for the artist. In *The Open*, Agamben argues that the *Umwelt* specific to human beings (what Uexküll calls the *Umgebung*) is itself comprised of many distinct perceptual worlds, possibly even including fictional perspectives, “There does not exist a forest as an objectively fixed environment: there exists a forest-for-the-park-ranger, a forest-for-the-hunter, a

forest-for-the-botanist, a forest-for-the-wayfarer, a forest-for-the-nature-lover, a forest-for-the-carpenter, and finally a fable forest in which Little Red Riding Hood loses her way.”<sup>65</sup> Agamben suggests an even more decentered perspective for human viewers, one which competes with natural organisms (as Uexküll describes) but also cultural formations, for example, a fairytale. In *Untilled*, fables were woven into the items deposited in the compost yard, suggesting fictional perceptual worlds. While some markers were clearly visible—Max Weber’s sculpture, for example—others could only be discerned after consulting drawings and notes, some of which were published in the documenta guidebook [Figure 4.18]. Even if some of these references were quite immediate for the in-the-know art crowd, their associations remained slippery and uncertain. Many documenta visitors, for example, would almost certainly associate the fallen oak trees in the space with Joseph Beuys’ iconic work *7000 Eichen*. However, Huyghe muddied this association by assigning the labels “Beuys Oak 1982” and “Dead Tree 69”—a work by Robert Smithson—to the same cluster of trees. Like the decaying organic materials in the compost, these allusions to cultural artifacts constantly fluctuated, dissolving into other references, and gradually receding into the background.

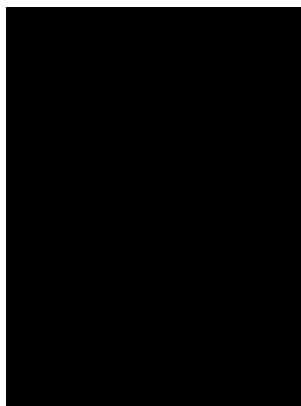


Figure 4.18. Pierre Huyghe, *Plan for Untilled*, 2010.

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<sup>65</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *The Open: Man and Animal* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2004), 41.

This was especially true for the literary references in *Untilled*, which brought elements of fantasy to life—poisonous plants and a turtle roaming around the site referenced Joris-Karl Huysman’s 1884 novel *À rebours*.<sup>66</sup> The story tells of a man who retreats from bourgeois society into a fantastical world of his own making. The protagonist plants a garden with poisonous flowers—preferring artifice over nature, he selects real flowers that resemble artificial ones. In a fit of decadence, the character has gemstones set into the shell of a tortoise; the creature dies due to the extra weight on its back [Figure 4.19]. A tale of decadence, vitality, death, and artifice, Huysman’s book provides an allegorical subtext for Huyghe’s work, acting as a script for the narratives that unfold in *Untilled*. Without the aid of preparatory drawings, few audiences were likely to recognize this reference. In this sense, it constitutes yet another *Umwelt* in the work, perceptible only to a few. For Huyghe, these imperceptible elements helped distance the work from the typical framework of an exhibition.

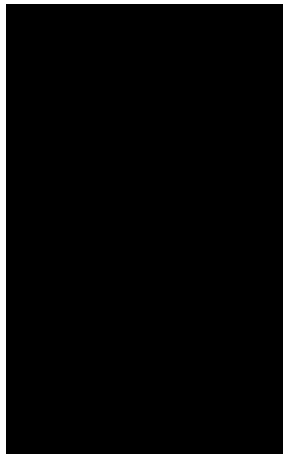


Figure 4.19. Illustration from Joris-Karl Huysman’s novel *À rebours*, 1884.

Huyghe’s notes for *Untilled* also point to the influence of Raymond Roussel’s novel *Locus Solus* (1914), which revolves around an aquarium filled with reanimated corpses who

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<sup>66</sup> Joris-Karl Huysmans, *À rebours* (Paris: A. Ferroud, 1920).

mindlessly repeat the same actions.<sup>67</sup> A scientist displays eccentric inventions in his country garden. The characters encounter a mechanical device resembling a pile driver that plunges teeth into the ground to create a mosaic. The unfinished mosaic depicts a sleeping horseman on a mission to defraud a princess. This bizarre, nonsensical scene resulted from Roussel's unusual method of composition, an elaborate game of wordplay based on rhyming words with similar sounds or juxtaposing multiple meanings of the same word.<sup>68</sup> Starting with *demoiselle à prétendant* (a young girl with a suitor), Roussel arrived at the phrase *demoiselle à reître en dents*. The latter phrase plays on an alternate meaning of *demoiselle* (a tool used to set stones into the ground) paired with the loosely rhyming phrase *reître en dents* (calvary man in teeth). Putting together the two phrases, Roussel conjured the image of a machine setting teeth into a mosaic depicting the princess and her horseman.



Figure 4.20. Illustration from Raymond Roussel's novel *Locus Solus* (1914) and Pierre Huyghe, *Untilled*, 2011–12, view of concrete blocks (right).

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<sup>67</sup> Raymond Roussel, *Locus Solus*, trans. Rupert Copeland Cuningham (New York: New Directions, 2017).

<sup>68</sup> Roussel's fantastical stories derived from a method of verbal punning, which the author carefully described in a posthumously published work, see *How I Wrote Certain of My Books: And Other Writings* (Boston: Exact Change, 1995).

In Roussel's fantastical machines, we find an allegory for representation itself, articulated through the slippery relationship between the object and its image. In another scene from *Locus Solus*, the characters encounter a large glass cage where performers act out *tableaux vivants*. The scientist reveals that the actors are corpses, reanimated with an elixir that "penetrated the brain and overcame its cadaveric rigidity, endowing the subject with an impressive artificial life."<sup>69</sup> The cadaver would then repeat the most significant moment in its life; a passage from the novel explains:

As a consequence of a curious awakening of memory, the latter would at once reproduce, with strict exactitude, every slightest action performed by him during certain outstanding minutes of his life; then, without any break, he would indefinitely repeat the same unvarying series of deeds and gestures which he had chosen once and for all. The illusion of life was absolute: mobility of expression, the continual working of the lungs, speech, various actions, walking — nothing was missing.<sup>70</sup>

In his first book, *Death and the Labyrinth*, Michel Foucault describes Roussel's reanimating machine as an analogue for the author's process:

In this world beyond death that is staged, everything is like life, its exact image. But it is imperceptibly separated by a thin black layer, the lining. Life is repeated in death, it communicates with itself across that absolute event, but it can never be rejoined. It's the same as life, but it's not life itself. From the scene acted out behind the glass panes of *Locus Solus* to what is displayed in a flawless analogy, from the rehearsal to what is rehearsed, there's an impossible distance traversed by an arrow going from one word to the same word within the process, language extending its reign to find again the identical but never the identical meaning. Without a pause, repetition, language, and death direct this play where they join one another in order to show what they separate.<sup>71</sup>

In other words, the figure of the undead represents the point of contact between living and dead—states which coexist but remain separated within the body of the reanimated corpse.

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<sup>69</sup> Roussel, *Locus Solus*, 209.

<sup>70</sup> Roussel, 209.

<sup>71</sup> Michel Foucault, *Death and the Labyrinth: The World of Raymond Roussel*, trans. Charles Ruas (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2006), 87.

Likewise, in Roussel's method, multiple meanings hang in suspension without negating one another, *demoiselle* as princess and pile driver.

Huyghe's compositional method borrows from these strategies of fanciful conflation, misdirection, and punning developed by Roussel.<sup>72</sup> In *Untilled*, a pile of square-cut concrete paving stones alludes to the heaps of teeth transported by the *demoiselle* machine in *Locus Solus* [Figure 4.20]. But even as these fictions leak into our experience of the work, we must also contend with the stones as bare material fact, something "just dropped" at the site. This method of dropping produces a chain of signifiers that allows multiple meanings to coincide. In one area of the park, Huyghe placed a concrete cistern filled with tadpoles. In a related drawing, a cluster of written terms conveys potential points of affinity: one might trace a relationship between "Robert Smithson" and works the artist made with the material "concrete"; or "concrete" can be associated with the words "Scarpa tomb," a reference to a cemetery designed by brutalist architect Carlo Scarpa; another inscription explains that the deathly tomb houses "tadpoles-frogs," a symbol of life and renewal that exists alongside a reference to "Invention of Morel," a novel about a machine that captures souls and projects their actions as 3D animations.<sup>73</sup> Rather

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<sup>72</sup> Roussel had a significant influence on the artist Marcel Duchamp who attended a performance of his play *Impressions d'Afrique* in Paris in 1912. Specifically, Duchamp credited Roussel as the inspiration for his iconic *Large Glass*, "It was fundamentally Roussel who was responsible for my glass, *La Mariée mise à nu par ses célibataires, même*. From his *Impressions d'Afrique* I got the general approach" (André Masson et al., "Eleven Europeans in America," *The Bulletin of the Museum of Modern Art* 13, no. 4/5 [1946]: 21). For more on the relationship between Roussel and Duchamp, see Francesco Miroglio, *The Bizarre World of Raymond Roussel and Marcel Duchamp's Large Glass* (Schwerin: Staatliches Museum Schwerin, 2020); and João Fernandes et al., *Locus Solus: Impressions of Raymond Roussel* (Madrid: Turner, 2011). While there is significant debate about whether Duchamp would have been aware of the details of Roussel's method at the time of creating *Large Glass*, Huyghe explicitly relates the two figures in his notes for *Untilled*, which place references to Duchamp's *Étant Donnée* alongside Roussel's *Locus Solus*.

<sup>73</sup> In a later interview, Huyghe describes the Scarpa tomb in more detail, explaining, "It's a burial ground for the family that produced Brionvega electronics. The tomb is a concrete complex with

than resolve these possible associations, Huyghe mobilizes divergent meanings to create an experience that refuses to complete itself. The artwork regenerates and reforms itself, making it difficult to reduce the experience to a singular script or scenario. Through Roussel, Huyghe seems to have found a way beyond the limited experiential framework of the exhibition—a method that hinges on the interface between the living and dead.

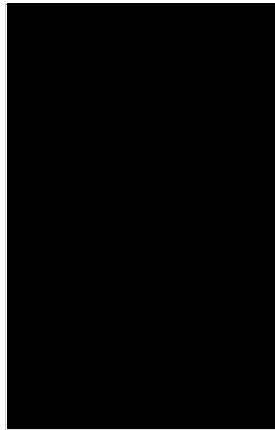


Figure 4.21. Illustration from Adolfo Bioy Casares's *Invention of Morel*, 1940.

In the drawings for *Untilled*, Huyghe also references Adolfo Bioy Casares's novel *The Invention of Morel* (1940).<sup>74</sup> As Huyghe describes, the novel hinges on the interplay between the artificial and the real: "There is a superimposition of the real and the image, sometimes two suns appear, the actual sun and the sun recorded by the image...In this island you have a kind of doubling, a permanent distance...How do you become an image?...a character under a certain

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a water system that flows within it. The pool in my work at documenta 13 was based on the pool there" (Wagstaff, "A Conversation with Pierre Huyghe," 29).

<sup>74</sup> Adolfo Bioy Casares, *The Invention of Morel* (New York Review of Books, 2003). *The Invention of Morel* is a frequent reference in Huyghe's practice; *Monster Island*, a work from 2009, is also based on the book. The speculative work proposes "monsters wander every day around a small island shaped like a garden in the Venetian Lagoon. Amid the vegetation and ruins, a living muse is on stage, doing nothing, while rumors of her presence spread. Several times a day, a boat carrying people leaves the city. The boat circles the island in search of this image" (Huyghe et al., *Pierre Huyghe (Lavigne)*, 152).

narrative.”<sup>75</sup> For Huyghe, the novel provides a model for thinking through the relationship between the exhibition and the waning of life. The story takes place on a deserted Polynesian island with a museum, chapel, and swimming pool [Figure 4.21]. A fugitive hiding away on the island notices a group of people have taken up residence in the museum. Observing the group from afar, the fugitive begins to fall in love with a woman he names Faustine. Eventually, he notices that the people appear to be repeating the same actions over the course of a week, like a record. On the final night of the week, a member of the group, the scientist Morel, reveals that he has devised a machine resembling a phonograph, which is capable of reproducing reality. He has recorded a group of tourists over the course of a week and projected their actions as three-dimensional moving images. Morel reveals that the looping recording has captured the tourists’ souls, causing them to relive the same week over and over. Like an old record played too many times, Morel reveals that the recorded images will gradually disintegrate, meaning that the tourists will eventually die. The fugitive realizes that the people on the island, including the woman he loves, are merely projections and must have died some time ago. Despite knowing their fate, he uses the machine to record himself, ensuring that he will “spend eternity in the joyous contemplation of Faustine.”<sup>76</sup> The fugitive gives up his role as a living observer, choosing to become an image or character in Morel’s museum; death provides the conditions for the consumption of his own affect as joyous contemplation. Morel’s museum bares striking similarities to the affective encounters staged within the contemporary art museum. If, as discussed above, the experience economy transforms one’s affects into objects for consumption, Huyghe’s allusion to Morel paints a grim picture for contemporary museum goers, who might be

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<sup>75</sup> David Lamelas, Hans Ulrich Obrist, and Pierre Huyghe, “David Lamelas: How Do You Become an Image?,” *Flash Art*, no. 270 (February 2010): 64–67.

<sup>76</sup> Casares, *The Invention of Morel*, 101.

doomed to slowly consume themselves to death. Like the novel, Huyghe's *Untilled* hinges on a moment of transformation, when experience becomes an image or character, one among many fictions the artist sets in motion. Crucially, this moment of transformation remains protracted and indeterminate, the fugitive has no idea when the others died or how long it will take for his own record to wear away. The specter of slow death provides a duration that is utterly ordinary, rather than spectacular or catastrophic, within its image Huyghe locates an affective disposition that might lie outside of the heightened intensity of experience offered by the experience economy.

*After ALife Ahead*

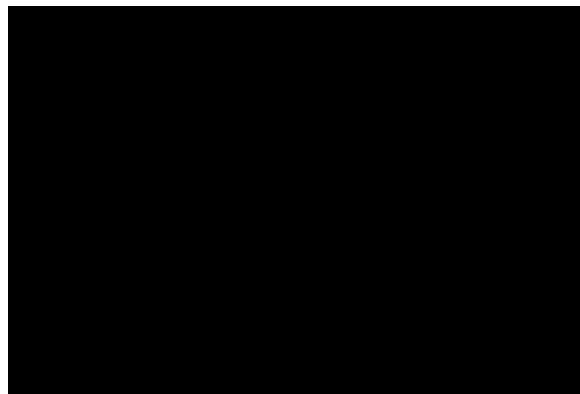


Figure 4.22. Pierre Huyghe, *After ALife Ahead*, 2017, concrete floor of ice rink, logic game, ammoniac, sand, clay, phreatic water, bacteria, algae, bees, aquarium, black switchable glass, *Conus textile*, GloFish, incubator, human cancer cells, genetic algorithm, augmented reality, automated ceiling structure, rain.

In 2017, Huyghe presented *After ALife Ahead* at Skulptur Projekte Münster, an ambitious installation in an abandoned ice rink on the outskirts of the city [Figure 4.18].<sup>77</sup> Within the skating arena, Huyghe developed a complex network of interconnected biological, technological, and geological systems. The history of human intervention in nature, and the degrees to which

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<sup>77</sup> Built in 1981, the indoor skating rink was slated for demolition in 2016. The building has since been demolished to make room for a housing complex planned to contain approximately 500 apartment units.

technology and biology interrelate, form the core of Huyghe’s project, the artist explains, “AAA cut through a history of technologies: everything in the place was informed by human effects. At the same time the human was absent, to a certain extent the site was dehumanised.”<sup>78</sup> Huyghe’s description of the complex project lists a wide range of materials, including a concrete ice-rink floor, sand, clay, phreatic water, bacteria, algae, bees, chimera peacocks, aquarium, black switchable glass, textile cone, incubator, human cancer cells, genetic algorithm, augmented reality program, automated ceiling structure, rain, ammoniac, and a logic game. The project began with the excavation of the site, Huyghe cut into the concrete flooring to reveal the layers of sediment and clay below. The cuts were determined by the *Stomachion*, a mathematical scheme developed by Archimedes in which a shape is broken apart and then reconstituted into various permutations; the same concept underlies the more familiar tangram puzzle [Figure 4.19].



Figure 4.23. Computer illustration of Rule 30 and a *Conus textile* shell similar in appearance to Rule 30.

In the center of the space, a large aquarium filled with concrete fragments housed a GloFish®, a species genetically modified to glow in the dark, and a *Conus textile*, a venomous sea snail [Figure 4.19]. Huyghe scanned the triangular pattern on the snail’s shell to create a

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<sup>78</sup> Huyghe and Obrist, “Conversation,” 234.

“score” that switched the aquarium glass from transparent to opaque black. The score also controlled sound in the space, which circulated through the system of pipes that once cooled the ice rink, transforming the structure into a kind of organ. Huyghe also replaced some of the venue’s pyramid-shaped ceiling panels with mechanized shutters that opened and closed according to the snail score, exposing the arena to the elements [Figure 4.20]. Shallow pools of water—replenished when rain fell through the apertures—contained algae blooms that grew according to the naturally varying atmospheric conditions in the space.

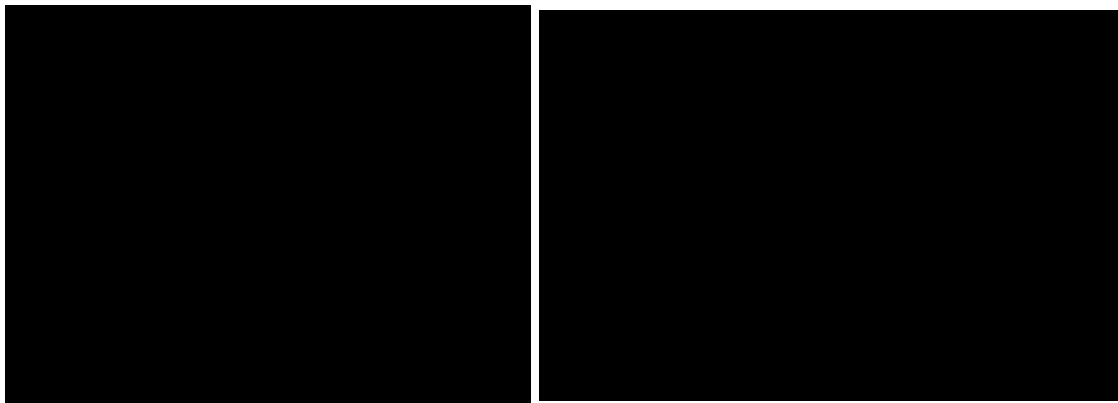


Figure 4.24. Pierre Huyghe, *After ALife Ahead*, 2017, shutters and beehive (left); cancer cell incubator (right).

Beehives made from mounds of earth were shaped to resemble Paleolithic “Venus” figurines—some of the earliest known ceramics created by firing clay. The hives were fitted with infrared sensors that recorded the internal temperature. This data was transmitted to an incubator containing human cancer cells, accelerating or decelerating the growth and multiplication of the cells [Figure 4.24].<sup>79</sup> In turn, the incubator controlled an augmented reality app on visitor’s smartphones, causing virtual pyramidal shapes to appear on the ceiling corresponding with the

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<sup>79</sup> The cancer cells were HeLa cells, so named after Henrietta Lacks, an African American woman whose cells were taken without consent and have been used for decades in labs around the world. A history of Lack’s cells is chronicled in Rebecca Skloot, *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* (New York: Crown, 2017).

rate of cell growth [Figure 4.25]. Oh, and there were also two “chimera” peacocks—birds with a distinct coloration resulting from a genetic mutation that produces two sets of DNA [Figure 4.25]. The sheer grandeur and technological sophistication of the project provoked awe at the same time that the nearly god-like regulation of living organisms bordered on dystopian science fiction. The mammoth project points to something of a predicament for Huyghe’s practice—relinquishing control of his systems requires maximum complexity, however, these immensely complex environments are almost world onto themselves, pointing back to Huyghe in the all-knowing creator of the work.

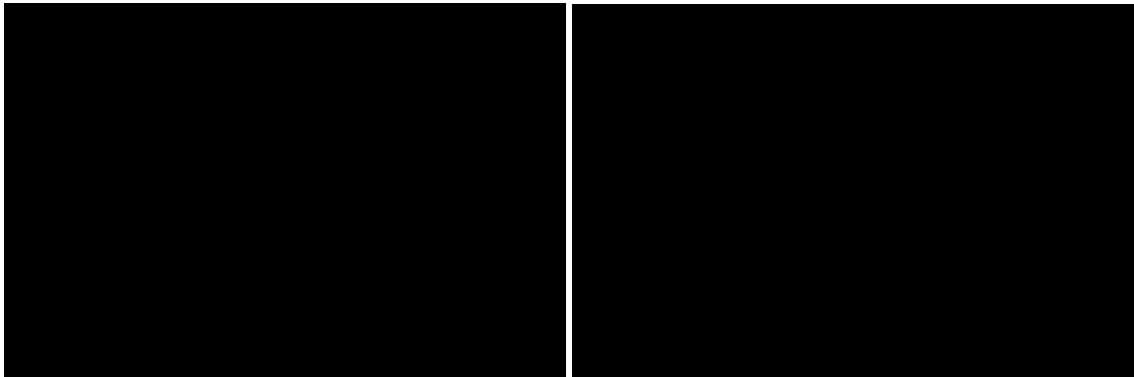


Figure 4.25. Pierre Huyghe, *After ALife Ahead*, 2017, augmented reality app (left); chimera peacock (right).

In many ways, Huyghe’s project expresses the advanced stages of neoliberal biopower, picturing technology’s intrusion into biological life. In *The Birth of Biopolitics*, Foucault describes the ways in which neoliberalism conceives of the individual in purely entrepreneurial terms, as *homo œconomicus*, or economic man. As Foucault elaborates, “*Homo œconomicus* is an entrepreneur, an entrepreneur of himself. This is true to the extent that, in practice, the stake in all neo-liberal analyses is the replacement every time of *homo œconomicus* as partner of exchange with a *homo œconomicus* as entrepreneur of himself, being for himself his own capital,

being for himself his own producer, being for himself the source of [his] earnings.”<sup>80</sup> Neoliberal analysis renders the body in terms of human capital, as a function of its capacity to be productive in economic markets. This conceptualization has tremendous ramifications for how the body is measured, traced, and recorded under a neoliberal regime. As Foucault describes, once the human body is understood as a form of productive capital, it becomes ripe for economic scrutiny—even at the molecular level: “One of the current interests in the application of genetics to human populations is to make it possible to recognize individuals at risk and the type of risk individuals incur throughout their life.”<sup>81</sup> The body’s genetic makeup serves as a set of data points that can be used to model an individual’s future earning power—the risk of contracting a certain disease or the prospects of one’s mental acuity. Alongside these inherited markers, are those environmental factors that might increase or inhibit one’s value as human capital—assets like educational training, access to medical care, and psychological health are all understood to be investments which will produce income. Speaking from the late 1970s, Foucault could not anticipate the extent to which science would eventually reach into the realm of genetic engineering, at the time mostly theoretical, he apologizes in his lectures for “engaging in a bit of science fiction here.”<sup>82</sup>

If the world about which Foucault could only speculate has now arrived, Huyghe’s technology-intensive work shows how far the science has developed. The artist has frequently consulted on his works with scientists including, in recent years, those on the forefront of genetic research. In 2015, during a year-long residency at the Artist’s Institute in New York, Huyghe invited the embryologist Ali H. Brivanlou to share his research. In a related diagram for *After*

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<sup>80</sup> Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 226.

<sup>81</sup> Foucault, 227.

<sup>82</sup> Foucault, 227.

*ALife Ahead*, the notes “Fate” and “Naïve” most likely refer to the Brivanlou, who discovered in the 1990s how to grow a brain in a Petri dish. Brivanlou’s experiments investigated how a cell in a naïve state determines its ultimate fate as a brain cell, skin cell, or so on. Theories about cell fate, that is, how a single fertilized egg develops into the differentiated cells that make up a more sophisticated organism, date back to at least to Aristotle’s collection of essays *Generation of Animals*, written around 350 BC. In the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, the debate settled into two schools of thought. The British school argued that a cell establishes fate by remembering its lineage (following the fate of its grandma, great-grandma, and so on). On the other side of the debate, the American school argued that cell fate is determined by a cell’s neighborhood (where it finds itself located and types of cells surrounding it). In the 1920s, the German researcher Hans Spemann essentially settled the debate by showing that signals coming from a neighborhood dictate individual cell fate. Picking up from this discovery, Brivanlou’s research asked what would happen to a cell if there were no neighbors to send it messages. His team of researchers found that if cell is isolated and deprived of signals from its neighbors, it will always adapt to become a brain cell.

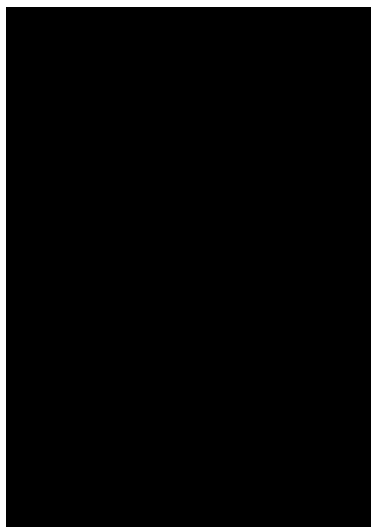


Figure 4.26 Pierre Huyghe, diagram for bioengineering a Nabokov butterfly, 2015

Pertinent to Huyghe's project, Brivanlou's experiments were performed on tadpole cells, when signals to these cells were blocked the tadpole turned into a giant brain. Brivanlou's discovery turned out to be a groundswell for genetic engineering, paving the way for scientists to decode the different signals sent to a given cell. This opened the way for scientist to create cell fates that would never be seen in nature, Brivanlou explains, "By cracking the code we can actually use it to dictate different fates to different cells in neighborhoods that would otherwise not allow for these fates...As we have done, it is possible to generate tadpoles that exhibit shapes and contours that you will never find in nature...I can make tadpoles with five tails, six eyes...I can create tadpoles that can smell colors."<sup>83</sup> Inspired by Brivanlou's research, Huyghe developed a speculative project to transform Vladimir Nabakov's fantastical drawings of butterflies, sketched in the margins of his book manuscripts, into living biological organisms [Figure 4.26].

As Huyghe describes, his interest in creating life relates to his desire to create exhibitions that might live independently of any given artist, venue, or time period:

I'd like to think of it as an odd, shifting ontology. The exhibition as a living entity, not only understood in the sense of its being tied to a biological, organic being. An exhibition is something that could evolve, be sentient, be sick, have consciousness...Maybe an exhibition could give birth to another one literally...Matter, chemical elements in a certain n arrangement might accidentally, over time, produce consciousness.<sup>84</sup>

Here, Huyghe describes *After ALife Ahead* as if it were a living, conscious being. What might an auto-generated exhibition, set in motion by human beings, that would go on to mutate and transform in unpredictable ways look like? While many of the formal decisions for the work were made by Huyghe, other aesthetic choices were left to environmental factors, for example the rate of cancer cell replication determined the number of pyramidal shapes that would appear

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<sup>83</sup> Ali H. Brivanlou and A. E. Benenson, "Cell Fate: An Interview," *The Magazine of the Artist's Insitute*, Pierre's, no. 1 (2016): 30.

<sup>84</sup> Huyghe and Obrist, "Conversation," 232.

in the augmented reality app. The idea that the choice made by a single cell might decide the look of Huyghe's work challenges neoliberalism's emphasis on the subject as the sum of his economic choices. At the same time, Huyghe has set these processes in motion, executed with a degree of calculation and optimization that borders on a kind of biotechnical nightmare. In this sense, we might think of the project as a kind of 'preserving machine', an attempt to transform the cultural artifact known as the exhibition into a living organism that can exist independently from human beings. Huyghe frequently cites Philip K. Dick's *The Preserving Machine* (1953) as an inspiration for his work.<sup>85</sup> The short story follows the protagonist Doc Labyrinth who, fearing for the safety of high culture in the event of an apocalypse, orders a machine be built that can transform musical scores into animals—Bach's concertos become beetles, Schubert's songs turn into lambs, and so on. The doctor releases his creatures into the world, but later finds they have evolved into wild beasts. When the creatures are fed back into the machine, their embedded musical scores have also changed, becoming wild and chaotic.

To experience *After ALife Ahead*, visitors had to literally crawl down into the muck, onto the mounds of dirt made muddy by rainwater that spilled into the rink through the ceiling's aperture. As they moved through the space, their feet trod on hundreds of dead insects—bees, but also flies which had unexpectedly begun to propagate in the space. While signs of life, including the effects of their own presence were recorded, the overall sensation of the experience was one of decay, of life on the verge of ending but replicating nonetheless. The pyramidal shapes on the ceiling of the venue are one example of this, as Huyghe explains:

On the ceiling were inverted black pyramids, typical designs of computer graphics from the 1980s—remember those simulations, lines going towards the horizon with Euclidean

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<sup>85</sup> Philip K Dick, *The Preserving Machine* (London: Grafton, 1987). The influence of *The Preserving Machine* on Huyghe's work is discussed in Alteveer, "Vestiges in the Rocks: Pierre Huyghe's Mineral Garden," 16.

objects floating above them? It was the perfect corporate image of the digital future, it was in every advert and film—remember the film *Tron* (1982)? So on the ceiling you could see this expression of a technological fantasy about the future.<sup>86</sup>

In *After A Life Ahead*, the future as imagined from the 1980s confronts the glacial past, literally seeping into the space from the water table. At the same time, the algorithm for the AR program generates new virtual shapes, holding open the possibility that the shapes will continue to grow indefinitely. As Huyghe explains, “The AR pyramidal shapes were driven by genetic algorithms and a game engine. The rules were that every time a threshold of cell division was reached in the incubator, one shape appeared in the AR. The shapes shifted in space to different locations. If two shapes got in proximity to one another, then a third one, the second generation, was produced.”<sup>87</sup> Within the app, Huyghe provides a model for how life might continue beyond the exhibition’s end, as a self-replicating computer-organism hybrid capable of infinitely replicating.

Ultimately, Huyghe’s exhibition was only temporary, cutting short the promise of the exhibition as a kind of perpetual birthing machine. When asked about the temporary life of the project, Huyghe lamented “[Munster] should remain. *Untilled* and *AAA* were the first steps toward this, but maybe something else should happen; giving an entity its own rights, an artificial personhood, not in the shape of anthropomorphic otherness like Prometheus, Frankenstein or an android, nor as an animism, but rather as a site of conscious existence, a first name.”<sup>88</sup> Huyghe’s reference to “giving an entity its own rights” recalls the artist’s early *Annlee* project, in which he purchased the rights to an animated avatar named Annlee. Ultimately, Huyghe and Parreno gave up their rights to Annlee’s image, using a legal contract to give the character ownership over its representation. While the gesture granted agency to Annlee, it

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<sup>86</sup> Huyghe and Obrist, “Conversation,” 235.

<sup>87</sup> Huyghe and Obrist, 315.

<sup>88</sup> Huyghe and Obrist, 317.

ultimately meant the character's death, as it was removed from systems of circulation. Simultaneously living on and expiring, what would it mean to apply this condition to an entire exhibition? How might we give an exhibition a first name? Following Huyghe, we might imagine that an exhibition, freed from the cycle of its own representation, might just walk off into the forest and continue living on. Although the Munster site was demolished as planned, the project's speculative potential lies in the imagined possibility of an experience that might take place outside of the grid of economic intelligibility. Or, perhaps, outside of our perceptual world altogether.

### **Conclusion: “Seeking specialist in community connection and audience participation”**

It is now 2022, roughly 30 years since the practices identified under the term relational aesthetics first emerged. Today, participatory art has been fully integrated into the contemporary art museum. Museum expansion projects have dedicated space to time-based experiences and world-class collections have acquired ephemeral encounters—works by the artist Tino Sehgal, for example, have been collected by international roster of museums, including the Walker Art Center, MCA Chicago, Guggenheim, and Tate Modern. It is possible to read these transitions cynically as a mere capitulation to market trends, most notably, the demands of the experience economy. But we might also ask if and how the turn to participation may fundamentally transform the missions of museums. As museums have begun to integrate the experiential into their collection and programs, audience expectations for what a museum does or should do for its public have also shifted. The collaborative and participatory practices shown in museums today encourage the public to join in, to become active participants in a social situation. Granted the status of art, these actions are held (somewhat tenuously) at an autonomous distance from the museum itself, confined to the duration of a performance, an action, or an exhibition. Transformed from passive spectator to active participant, might the public begin to view themselves outside of the work of art, as active participants in the social community of the museum itself?

Today, museums are being asked to integrate equity and inclusion, community engagement, and social belonging into the heart of what they do. The past few years have seen renewed urgency around these issues—scrutiny of funding sources, unionization movements, pleas for fairer artist compensation, calls for more diversified staff, and demands for greater community involvement have been directed at museums. These calls to action have forced an

identity crisis for museums, chipping away at the much-vaunted neutrality of the institution. Crucially, the idea that activism and social engagement be confined to artwork alone has been deeply discredited. We are in the nascent days of a transformation within museums, as institutions reshape their staff and programs with an eye toward community engagement and collaboration.

This chapter’s subtitle comes from a recent call for applications put out by a major contemporary museum in the US, it signals, I think, a newly emerging role within museums, centered on participatory engagement: the specialist in community connection and audience participation. At least in name, the ground seems to be shifting—the Walker Art Center retitled their education department into the Department of Public Engagement, Learning, and Impact; the Museum of Modern Art added “audience engagement” to their Director of Learning title; SFMOMA has added the position of Chief Education and Community Engagement Officer; and the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago has begun piloting an “embedded engagement” model designed to “create avenues for input from the communities on whose behalf curators, artists, and exhibitions ‘speak’” in a more porous process that “leads directly to a renewed sense of social belonging and community.”<sup>1</sup> Whether museums adopt this focus in more than just name is yet to be seen. In these pages, I have traced a set of artistic practices that interrogate the very possibility of participation itself, through them we articulate a nuanced investigation of what it means to engage—in all its boredom, compromise, disinterest, and waning. Perhaps these practices will keep us honest.

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<sup>1</sup> Madeleine Grynsztejn, “A Crisis of Fairness,” in *Museum of the Future: Now What?*, ed. Cristina Bechtler and Dora Imhof (New York: JRP Editions, 2022), 101–2.

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