



Burnout: Liam Gillick's Post-Fordist Aesthetics

Bill Roberts

Unlike 'postmodernism', the term 'post-Fordism' is today in rude health, its currency stronger than ever in the fields of social and cultural criticism.¹ At its broadest, it denotes the set of increasingly global socioeconomic conditions that first emerged with the crisis of Fordist patterns of standardized mass production and consumption from the early 1970s onwards. Spearheaded by managerial, technological and financial innovations in industrialized countries; spurred by the information and communication revolutions of the last three decades; and stabilized by the hegemony of neoliberal economic and social policy; post-Fordism imbricates the economic, the social, the political and the cultural. Perhaps most influentially, and though he resists the term itself, David Harvey has emphasized flexibility as the key attribute of the post-Fordist regime of accumulation, operative at the 'micro' level of labour processes in the factory and office, the 'macro' levels of corporate strategy and labour supply management, and at the level of highly differentiated and constantly changing patterns of consumption.² Flexibility is a defining feature of post-Fordist economies, but its logic extends beyond the purely economic, and opens onto other aspects of contemporary experience. The result is a widespread cultural logic of dislocation and disruption.

These qualities are palpable in Liam Gillick's fifteen-minute-long projected video, *Everything Good Goes* (2008; plate 1 and plate 2), which depicts an artist seated in an office-cum-studio, rendering a 3D computerized model of the factory set of Jean-Luc Godard and Jean-Pierre Gorin's film, *Tout va bien* (1972).³ The artist's face remains unseen and a recorded voicemail message offers speculative thoughts to do with contemporary conditions of work. The message's rapid, paratactic delivery enacts its own discussion of the kind of 'perpetually reformed' production of ideas in a state of 'constant displacement' and flux that may (but equally may not) hold out some kind of resistance to the instrumental language of what it describes as today's 'seminarized, flexibilized, hot-desk zombie discourse'.⁴

Translated as 'Everything's Fine', or more literally as 'Everything Goes Good', Godard and Gorin's film centres on a strike at the Salumi sausage factory in Paris. Key scenes in this film feature a slow tracking shot moving across the factory offices in order to reveal what is clearly a mocked-up cross-section of the building. As the action moves from one coop-like office to the next, the silent actors of the other rooms, still in shot, rest to form *tableaux vivants*. Godard's ultra-slow tracking shot is clearly deployed in *Tout va bien* in the service of a Brechtian estrangement effect. This slow track reappears in Gillick's video, but here a different kind of distraction from the critical distantiation theorized by Bertolt Brecht and Walter Benjamin is effected,

Detail of Liam Gillick, *The view constructed by the factory after it stopped producing cars*, 2005 (plate 10).

DOI:
10.1111/j.1467-8365.2012.00954.x
Art History | ISSN 0141-6790
XX | X | Month XXXX | pages
XX-XX

1 Liam Gillick, *Everything Good Goes*, 2008. Digital video still. Installation view, *The Vincent Award 2008*, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, 2008. © Liam Gillick, 2008. Photo: © Gert Jan van Rooij.

2 Liam Gillick, *Everything Good Goes*, 2008. Digital video still. Installation view, *The Vincent Award 2008*, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, 2008. © Liam Gillick, 2008. Photo: © Gert Jan van Rooij.



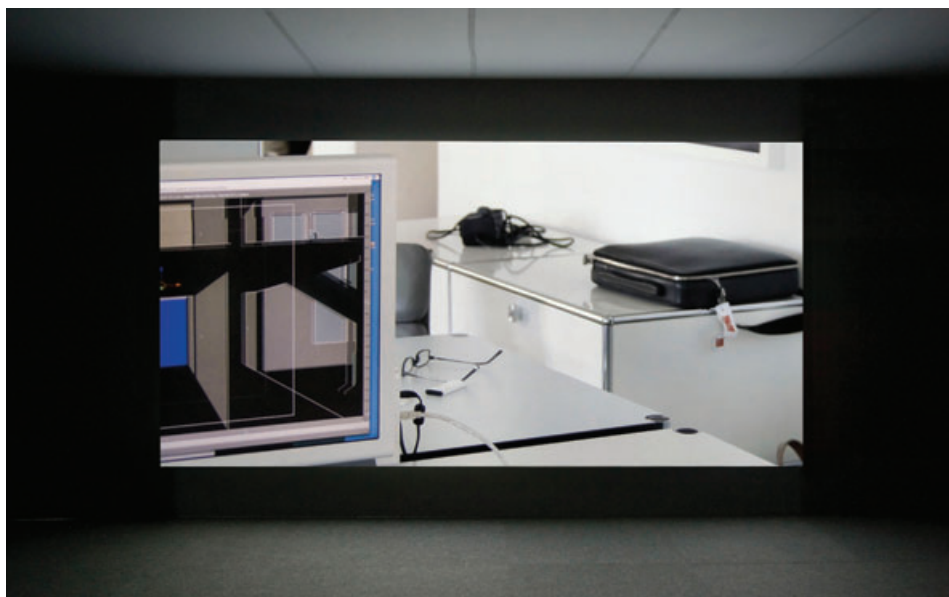
one which seems implicitly to question the possibility of escaping or disengaging from perceptual immediacy in order to arrive at a detached, self-present and critical consciousness.⁵ Rather than stepping back to expose the artifice of the scene for the purposes of critical clarity, Gillick's camera lingers on the glimmering chrome-plated and white-plastic Apple Mac world of the artist's sleek minimalist workplace, tracing the clean lines of its geometry, playing with shifts of focus and delighting in its reflections and shadows (plate 3). Seduced by the surface sheen of this antiseptic environment, the camera is distracted from both the artist's work of architectural rendering and the disjointed stream of thought caught on the voicemail soundtrack. In fact, each of the three principal elements of Gillick's video are distracted from the others and absorbed in their own activity: the camera in its close articulation of the designer office's curves and corners, the artist-protagonist in his precise re-articulation and refinement of the virtual factory, and the voicemail message, lost in the forward momentum of speculation and projection.

The triangulated dislocation of soundtrack, *mise-en-scène* and spare dramatic content in *Everything Good Goes* approximates the intractable problem of the interrelation of Gillick's artistic labour and his works' form and content. My argument, in this article, is that Gillick's work is legible as a sophisticated articulation and negotiation of the conditions of critical artistic practice in post-Fordist society, its autonomy both sustained and perpetually threatened by the latter's insidious cultural logic. Formal and thematic dislocation emerge as the key means by which Gillick's aesthetic both converges with, and diverges from, the non-aesthetic exchangeability of the brand.

Stewart Martin has noted in passing the singularity of Gillick's achievement in 'configuring the forms of art and capitalism', in likely allusion to Theodor Adorno's notion (after Benjamin) of configurational or constellational form as a play of aspects – continuity and discontinuity, association and dissociation – whereby conceptual analysis moves towards the non-conceptuality of the aesthetic.⁶ Through these means, Gillick explores the forms, and formal correspondence, of contemporary art and capitalist production. Yet despite the centrality of this theme, the persistent dislocation between parts in Gillick's work ensures the difficulty of articulating the whole scene of his practice. *Meaning Liam Gillick*, a volume of essays by twelve prominent critics, curators and theorists that accompanied Gillick's major travelling exhibition *Three Perspectives and a Short Scenario* (2008–10), was, for much of its length, a notable sample of the sort of fragmentary, occasionally evasive, critical attention that Gillick has thus often inspired.⁷ If the literature on Gillick has sometimes lost clear sight of what I take to be the work's central problematic of the relation between art and capitalism, then this also reflects the intransigent difficulty of his abiding question: how might culture imagine programmatic social change today, and how might such change be activated, in a world where, it is assumed, the post-Fordist and post-Soviet restructurings of capitalism have effected a radical deterritorialization of power across the social fabric as a whole?

Gillick's development of a supremely multi-skilled and 'flexibilized' model of practice is his way of establishing a homology between emergent conditions of contemporary artistic labour and the frantic rhythms and disjunctions of production and everyday life under post-Fordism, for the purposes of bringing each into

3 Liam Gillick, *Everything Good Goes*, 2008. Digital video still. Installation view, *The Vincent Award 2008*, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, 2008. © Liam Gillick, 2008. Photo: © Gert Jan van Rooij.



critical perspective. The parallel is neat, since, as Nancy Fraser has written, not only does 'flexibilization' name 'both a mode of social organization and a process of self-constitution', but 'it is a process of self-constitution that correlates with, arises from, and resembles a mode of social organization'.⁸ In other words, the 'flexible personality' of the archetypal post-Fordist worker is today valorized in her or his most intimate relations and communicative and creative capacities.⁹ I shall here describe the complex dynamics operating in and around Gillick's work as a negotiation of this condition, caught within the very contradictions that the work seeks to disclose, in order to position the artist as a key exponent of a highly reflexive 'post-Fordist aesthetic'. To do this, I will develop a picture of a post-Fordist dynamics of artistic labour by selectively attending to the unfolding trajectory of Gillick's work as a series of visual and textual constellations across time, and offering a more systematic account of the configurational interplay of its various elements than hitherto provided. In doing so, the argument heeds Adorno's central contention that 'aesthetic relations of production ... are sedimentations or imprintings of social relations of production'.¹⁰ At the same time, the analysis of Gillick's work demonstrates the manner in which the terms of a post-Fordist aesthetics may today exceed those of Adorno's own defence of the sovereign artefactuality of the singular work of art. The networked, flexible, deterritorialized mode of contemporary post-Fordist production finds its aesthetic counterpart in equally dispersed forms of artistic practice.¹¹

Flexibility

Flexibility in the sphere of work is today widely experienced as a friction between excessive specialization and insecurity of employment. Freed up by the rise of outsourcing and offshore production, the volatile hypermobility of capital has greatly increased both the instability and complexity of global divisions of labour, and this has led to the need for endless remixing and upgrading of skills on the part of labour's privileged strata, especially in the most advanced capitalist economies. Indeed, while the widespread turn towards so-called 'just-in-time' manufacturing has redoubled the centrality of networks of communication and information to production in general, a broad division between material (factory) production and immaterial (brand) production has also sharpened. Material production is today overwhelmingly concentrated in globally peripheral areas, while brand production and other forms of immaterial labour are predominantly carried out in major metropolitan centres. Commodity production nowadays moves through material and immaterial phases that are increasingly socially and geographically divorced, while both phases are highly complex and variegated in themselves, and enormously sensitive to the fickle tides of speculation and projection in the deregulated financial sphere. Gillick's objects and installations register this tendency towards the abstraction of form and content that is inherent in the wider world of commodity production and consumption. As will be shown, it is especially in his sculptural work that the divorce is staged, and enacted in precisely the visual mode in which form and content are, or have at least historically been, understood to be indivisible: the language of modernist abstraction. Evoking Adorno's and Max Horkheimer's conception of instrumental rationality, Gillick suggests that modernist abstraction, as the site of the emancipatory promises of the past, has itself submitted to the total exchange logic of the present.¹²

Over the last two decades, Gillick has become one of the most practically and intellectually restless international artists currently working. His highly prolific,

protean practice has spanned a variety of media and arenas, from sculpture, installation, music, graphic design and film to curating and the writing of novellas and critical texts, as well as commissioned projects in gallery, public and corporate spaces that often take on the character of architectural or interior design solutions. The various outcomes, like the formal and thematic dissonance of *Everything Good Goes*, are remarkable for their frequent shifts of focus, lapses of logic, formal disunity, and their simultaneous aura of urgency, resolve, interruption and distraction. For Gillick, the freedom to be distracted is an effect of the privileged flexibility of artistic practice in general, but to the extent that Gillick's practice is rife with false starts, interruptions and a sense of perpetual disruption, it is consonant with a wider logic of post-Fordist flexibilization.¹³ However, these very qualities also mean that this logic has come into view, as a site of explicit reflection, with a variable focus across his oeuvre. I have chosen for consideration examples drawn from the constellations of work relating to Gillick's fictional quasi-narratives *Discussion Island/Big Conference Centre*, from the mid-late 1990s and into the early 2000s, and *Construcción de Uno*, which has oriented much of his output since 2004. Each of these texts relates to a key aspect of the post-Fordist imaginary: a diffuse entrepreneurial, administrative and managerial class for whom work and life are thoroughly enmeshed, and the semi-autonomous small group in the flexibilized factory. It is in the nebulous gatherings of work that are woven around these fictional 'scenarios' that Gillick moves closest to a sustained examination of the contemporary logic of production, and where the artist's critical and mimetic impulses are pressed into their most interesting tension in relation to such a logic.

For Gillick, the key problem confronting contemporary critical art is the disappearance of a determinate object of critique, in the apparent absence of which capital's perpetual displacements continue regardless. But if, as he avers, 'there is still the feeling that stories get told, that the past is being reconfigured and that the near future gets shaped' – if what Gillick characterizes as today's 'chaotic opportunistic capitalist globalization' is daily reproduced through myth, narrative and built form – then art may yet remain a key site for the close interrogation of this ideological fabric.¹⁴ For his part, Gillick seeks to outwit precisely this displacement and disappearance, to proceed by way of diversion, detour and uncertainty. His is the quintessence of a flexible, multifaceted and multitasking, project-based practice, perfectly attuned to what Luc Boltanski and Ève Chiapello have called a 'connexionist world', in which 'the tension between the mobility of the artist and the obsessive fixity of those who prosper in the business world tends to diminish'.¹⁵ Gillick is a pre-eminent artist-networker and project-catalyst, and Boltanski and Chiapello argue in their study *The New Spirit of Capitalism* (1999), that since the 1970s there has emerged a 'societal project ... to make the network a normative model' of social and economic organization, of production 'conceived as a succession of projects'.¹⁶ The network is the archetypally flexible form of social organization, and one of its effects is to obscure, and possibly erase, the distinction between work-time and life-time, at least for those at the cutting edge of informational production. For Boltanski and Chiapello, this societal project has been capital's primary response to the counter-cultural critique of the 1960s and 1970s, and especially to its rallying cries against alienation and massified consumerism. For Gillick, it has propelled the twin processes of the aestheticization of work and the commodification of aesthetics, threatening the terminal eclipse of art's freedom as a placeholder for social freedom at large.

Discursive Criticality

By his own assessment, Gillick's work has 'multiple entry points', though he remains best known for his gallery installations and books.¹⁷ In these, he elaborates fictive scenarios and spaces that draw on contemporary design interiors ranging from airports and factories to hotel lobbies, offices, conference centres and style bars, all the while invoking 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. The arrangement of these and other built forms in his installations in turn recalls the composite interiors of Gerrit Rietveld (plate 4, plate 5 and plate 6).

During the 1980s, artists of a generation preceding Gillick's, such as Julian Opie and Thomas Schütte, had adopted positions of variously ironic and melancholic distance from the forms of modernist design. Gillick's stance towards this heritage is less ironic than it is conflicted; it appears 'stranded' between melancholy and a twinned sense of historical contingency and possibility.¹⁸ What, Gillick asks, has become of the utopian impulse in a 'post-utopian' neoliberal world increasingly structured, or so he suggests, as a competitive and boundless field of continually shifting power-networks, wherein we appear to have witnessed a decisive 'victory

4 Liam Gillick, *Consultation Filter*, 2000. Anodized aluminium, plywood, Formica. Installation view, *Liam Gillick: Consultation Filter*, Westfälischer Kunstverein, Münster, 2000. © Liam Gillick, 2000. Photo: © Roman Mensing.



5 Liam Gillick, *Applied Resignation Platform*, 1999. Anodized aluminium, Perspex. Installation view, *Liam Gillick: David*, Frankfurter Kunstverein, 1999. © Liam Gillick, 1999. Photo: © Katrin Schilling.



of speculation over planning’?¹⁹ As if restating the question posed by Godard and Gorin in *Tout va bien*, Gillick seems to ask: ‘to change everything, where do you start?’ In the film, the query is met with the exasperated response, ‘everywhere!’, yet Gillick’s call is not for a revolutionary Year Zero. Instead, he posits the reclamation of the concept of design from its consumerist slumber, as a renewed site of resistance and progressive imagination.²⁰ Gillick asks whether the figure of ‘utopia’ might be revived as the limit-thought of this expanded notion of design, as a ‘stage ... or station in the development of any progressive idea’.²¹

Design, nevertheless, implies systematicity. To be sure, this is promised or suggested by the methodicalness of Gillick’s working practice, characterized chiefly by a continual relay between published text and installation, or, at its loosest, between a currently operative scenario or literary vignette and the proliferating exhibition practice of Gillick as visual artist. It is suggested, also, by his notable stylistic consistency, characterized above all by the frequent use of pine, Helvetica fonts with occasional forays into other typographical designs, unbroken and superimposed text fragments that recall the tradition of concrete poetry, and bright Plexiglas and anodized aluminium in simple geometric configurations. However, systematicity is equally consistently undercut by the involuted fragments that make up the ostensible thematic content of the work itself, and that perpetually defer any kind of resolution or open declaration of political or analytical position-taking.

Commenting revealingly on a split in the Cologne gallery scene of the early-mid 1990s, Gillick differentiates his approach from the more critically transparent work of artists showing at Galerie Christian Nagel from around this time, including Andrea Fraser, Christian Philipp Müller and Fareed Armaly. He situates his practice alongside those of Philippe Parreno, Angela Bulloch, Vanessa Beecroft and others who were involved, during the same period, with Galerie Schipper und Krome, and ‘who believed that a sequence of veils and meanderings might be necessary to combat the chaotic ebb and flow of capitalism’, leading these others ‘to become sceptical shape-shifters in relation to the dominant culture’.²² In this and similar statements, Gillick reveals his inclination towards a Gilles Deleuze-inspired conception of the global neoliberal order as a space of unrestricted and unpredictable material and



6 Liam Gillick, *Big Conference Centre Middle Management Platform*, 1998. Anodized aluminium, Plexiglas. Installation view, *Liam Gillick: Up on the twenty-second floor*, Air de Paris, Paris, 1998. © Liam Gillick, 1998. Photo: © DR, courtesy of Air de Paris.

immaterial flows (of information, bodies, time and space); an 'intensive multiplicity' that will continually thwart our best rational attempts to track it.²³ In fact, Gillick's explicit statements on the nature of contemporary capitalism at times feel overplayed, and his characterizations of neoliberalism as 'chaotic' stand in danger of naturalizing what, after all, was a meticulously designed and fiercely implemented programme from the start. Gillick's victory of speculation over planning was, precisely, planned.²⁴

Gillick's aversion to critical transparency and oppositionality resonates with the more apocalyptic moments of the post-autonomist account of immaterial labour that has itself become an important intellectual tributary within the wider debate on post-Fordism.²⁵ In the most influential of these accounts, from 1996, Maurizio Lazzarato argues that the labour of communication is today all but utterly subsumed within a capitalist logic of equivalence and exchange, directly productive of surplus-value, and the more transparent it is the better it enacts this logic.²⁶ Similarly, the sociologist Scott Lash argues that the 'general immanence of informationalization' has irrevocably destroyed the traditional spaces and possibilities of critique, which, now as 'Informationskritik' rather than *Ideologiekritik*, must play the additive, supplemental role of 'modest witness' to the 'immanent and global actor-networks of the information age'.²⁷

Each of these arguments speaks to Gillick's own preference for critically inhabiting corporate- and neo-management-speak. For the artist and critic John Kelsey, Gillick appropriates such language to produce 'assemblage[s] of enunciation' that move across subject(s) and object(s), veiling and unveiling meaning, and moving in all directions from the position of the centre, from where there is 'the possibility of wearing discourse down, hollowing it out, dismantling it in order to make it sing', so that 'speech becomes free'.²⁸ In truth, however, this 'dismantling' presents no easy escape, and while Kelsey's Deleuzian idiom is colourful and suggestive, Gillick by no means offers any miraculous breakthrough to unmediated singularity. Rather, across his work he seeks, through his supple, flexibilized dynamics of relay, deferral and proliferation, to salvage and sustain a vestigial immanent critique. Configuring what Adorno called the 'discursively recognized universal' language of administration, Gillick seeks, as he puts it, to 'retain, rather than merely represent, the notion of a critical position'.²⁹

A persistent feature of Gillick's writing and lectures, then, is his continual deferral of the task of establishing either a determinate subject or object of discussion. For the artist, this ruse aligns his practice with what he calls today's 'discursive model of praxis' of critical art, the only apparent possibility for resistance to the dwindling distinction between artistic and alienated work.³⁰ The 'discursive framework' is elaborated in two recent texts by Gillick, *Maybe it would be better if we worked in groups of three?* of 2008, and his *Berlin statement*, published in the catalogue accompanying his commission for the German Pavilion at the Venice Biennale in 2009.³¹ Gillick plays

here on the double, contradictory meanings of the 'discursive', so that it becomes something other than it was for Adorno, namely an equivocal term that might refer either to logical reasoning as the subsumption of the particular under the universal (closer to Adorno's understanding of the term), or to the 'rambling' and 'digressive', and to a mode of discussion that might resist this identity-thinking by leaping 'rapidly or irregularly from one subject to another' – by becoming constellational.³² (The related noun, 'discourse', emphasizes the regularity of a system or exchange of meaning, and lacks the adjective's connotations of disorder and short-circuiting.) By way of the discursive mode, both Gillick's writing and visual practice aim to be as elusive and slippery as their ever-displaced and displacing object, the financialized flows of capital itself. As he states: '[the] discursive framework projects a problem just out of reach, and this is why it can also confront a socio-economic system that bases its growth upon "projections"'.³³ Just as Gillick's labour effectively mimes the connexionist logic of Boltanski and Chiapello's new capitalist, then, so does his notion of the discursive here ascribe to critical thought and artistic practice similar qualities of speculation, projection, dislocation and disruption as pertain to the logic of the post-Fordist economy at large.

So how does this confrontation play out? Gillick's book, *Discussion Island/Big Conference Centre* (1997), remains the artist's fullest literary treatment of the discursive model. With chapter titles including 'Conciliation', 'Delay', 'Consensus', 'Revision' and 'Assessment', *Discussion Island/Big Conference Centre* might be characterized, in its own terms, as 'a look at the idea of the centre ground of socio-economic organisation from corporate stress to bureaucratic compromise', though it also deliberately resists any quick summary of this kind.³⁴ The book's language pushes a diffuse corporate bureaucratise towards a kind of oneiric half-sense, a 'mirage of analysis' in the midst of which a trio of 'strategists' pursue their (apparent) business of producing a report on the development of a 'think tank about think tanks', although it is never fully clear who is narrating, nor who is doing what and to what end.³⁵ By the end of the book, the reader is given to suspect that the completion of the report, which seems to be foiled at every 'narrative' turn, has been left indefinitely delayed ('However hard you try it's always tomorrow'), while at other moments one has the sense that the text of *Discussion Island* might be that of the finished report itself, whose content is nothing more than the narration of its own frustrated (in)completion.³⁶ This possibility is further suggested by the fact that the novella itself, as well as the larger group of works assembled under the general heading of *Discussion Island*, produced between 1996 and 1998, were already projected in a series of brief quasi-expository texts written by Gillick in 1996, entitled *The What If? Scenarios*; scenario 3.3 bears the title: *Report Requirements: Towards the publication of the What If? Scenario Report titled Discussion Island*.³⁷ Meanwhile, the novella's eponymous conference centre, though described in some detail, appears no more central as the site of immaterial production than the bars and aeroplane cabins that are also mentioned, and indeed, the text frequently announces abrupt switches of location. These, together with references to the protagonists as 'characters', suggest a different kind of report, such as a pitch for a film or television project, thus another cryptic means whereby the text seems to gesture outside itself to a projected but infinitely postponed future.

As a self-conscious assemblage, Gillick's text outruns the will to interpret in this manner, though each of these readings would account for something of the book's anticipatory charge: the sense that, besides all of the distraction and procrastination, the drinking and the sleeping, '[s]ome work is about to begin and the terms of development are fading into view'.³⁸ The book-as-report exegesis would also

account for the novella's occasional teasingly lucid moments, the relative instances of clarity that the author lets slip amid the multi-clausal sentences, repetitive prose and meandering propositions. These, taken together, might be read as something of a mission statement for the artist (in any case, the impersonal and administrative tone of that literary form is in evidence throughout the book). At times they frame the 'dominant management culture' along the above-mentioned quasi-Deleuzian lines, while at others they allude to what are thereby reckoned to be the shrunken parameters of today's politico-aesthetic terms of engagement, echoed in the repeated phrase: '[if] you can't stand in the way of progress, maybe we can hinder development'.³⁹ More revealingly, Gillick suggests that 'to try and address the vast central area that includes bureaucracy, compromise, conciliation and so on', one must 'move inside the thinking and add to the confusion'.⁴⁰

In the full sense of what Deleuze and Félix Guattari call 'minor literature', 'Oedipal' metaphor is eschewed in favour of 'schizo' metamorphosis; paradigmatic meaning gives way to the syntagmatic collision of voices and noises.⁴¹ However, figurative modes do not entirely escape the prose of *Discussion Island*. Opening the book, an anonymous worker leaps from the twenty-second floor of the conference centre, meeting his end on the roof of a Toyota: the archetypal product of post-Fordist polyvalence here meets the burnout of working life lived 'just-in-time'. Characterizations of the conference centre itself as a 'tribute to flexibility' but also to 'vagueness' perhaps come closest to articulating what Gillick elsewhere avows is the principal object of his critique: the anomic centre ground of networked management and administration whose operation has been rendered utterly opaque even to itself.⁴² It is revealed that the twenty-second floor of the centre has been silently but deliberately overlooked during the building's construction, perhaps in order to hold open the possibility, and certainly the hope, that it might come to fulfil an undisclosed 'specific' role within a structure otherwise given over to 'multiple parameters and possible functions', a safe haven from the intolerable indeterminacy of the edifice.⁴³ However, after some relatively lengthy consideration, all that is finally learnt about this floor are the precise details of its design. Ultimately, the reader is told, only the 'furniture remains specific'.⁴⁴



7 Liam Gillick, *Up on the twenty-second floor*, 1998. Mixed media. Installation view, *Liam Gillick: Up on the twenty-second floor*, Air de Paris, Paris, 1998. © Liam Gillick, 1998. Photo: © DR, courtesy of Air de Paris.

The place of design on the twenty-second floor of the conference centre mirrors the place of Gillick's sculpture-as-design in his practice as a whole: each is invested with the unfulfilled promise of a specific function or meaning. The *Discussion Island*-related exhibition, *Up on the twenty-second floor*, held at Paris's Air de Paris gallery in 1998 (plate 7), toyed with and thwarted this expectation, promising in such details as a Helvetica sign on the gallery wall reading '22è étage' [sic], and not least in the show's title, to unlock a corpus of meaning that eludes the reader's grasp in the book. In an extended discussion of Gillick's practice as the construction of opportunities for the freely determined, exploratory consideration of experimental models of sociability in a mediatized world, Ina Blom notes of *Discussion Island* that it is only in the text's protracted descriptions of the designed interior of the twenty-second floor that the frenetic pace and 'flickering television-type cuts' of the novella itself seem to come to rest, settling down into a measured consideration of the wooden floor and French windows of what is described as the 'room with Coca-Cola coloured walls'.⁴⁵ This intimate, phenomenological mode of description seems to hold out the promise that the organization of space might just help to organize a coherent thought, but might equally amount to nothing more than a further distraction from the urgently pressing but unnameable task lying perpetually in wait.

Text-Object Relay and Project-Proliferation as Praxis

These tropes of delay or deferral, and of design as distraction, are extended in Gillick's unfinished text, *Construcción de Uno*, and the spin-off projects that have attended its production. Here, deferral ultimately proscribes the production of a single bound volume. *Construcción de Uno* was initially announced in 2004 as a planned publication but its arrival has since become indefinitely postponed, instead appearing sporadically as suggestive fragments inserted into various textual, performance and exhibition contexts (as press releases and lectures, for instance).⁴⁶ Of the latter, the exhibition *A short text on the possibility of creating an economy of equivalence*, held at the Palais de Tokyo, Paris, in 2005, held a number of clues for the illumination, if not explication, of Gillick's fictional scenario.

Construcción de Uno's fragmented narrative is derived from the artist's own enquiry into Brazilian research on Swedish car production. This focus was prompted by an unfulfilled invitation to Gillick to collaborate on the renovation of the town square in Kalmar, Sweden, location of an innovative Volvo factory, operative until 1994, that opened twenty years earlier with a nascent post-Fordist programme of flattened shop-floor hierarchies, flexible rhythms and small-group work. *Construcción de Uno*'s allusions to this real-life case are clear. The text depicts the scenario of a group of workers made redundant by a 'recent' factory closure in an unnamed northern European country.⁴⁷ Partly 'out of habit and boredom' and partly from 'some sense of purpose and collectivism', the workers proceed – 'some time later', probably the 'near future' – to repurpose the building as a centre for the production of ideas.⁴⁸ The 'economy of equivalence' of the Paris exhibition's title provides the workers' apparent theoretical orientation: the creation of a 'virtual production line' of perfect equilibrium, guided by a one-to-one ratio of input and output rather than 'addition, deletion, waste or surplus'.⁴⁹ Old habits die hard, however, and the workers quickly become preoccupied with 'methodically dismantling everything', before setting about adapting their immediate environment, slicing many narrow wall-length gaps into the factory's sides through which to view a rudimentary mountain landscape that they have constructed from remaindered steel.⁵⁰ Two large painted steel structures exhibited at Palais de Tokyo (*A diagram of the factory once the former workers had cut*

8 Liam Gillick, *A diagram of the factory once the former workers had cut extra windows in the walls*, 2005. Painted steel. Installation view, *Liam Gillick: A short text on the possibility of creating an economy of equivalence*, Palais de Tokyo, Paris, 2005. © Liam Gillick, 2005. Photo: © Daniel Moulinet.

9 Liam Gillick, *The view constructed by the factory after it stopped producing cars*, 2005. Painted steel. Dimensions variable. Installation view, *Liam Gillick: A short text on the possibility of creating an economy of equivalence*, Palais de Tokyo, Paris, 2005. © Liam Gillick, 2005. Photo: © Daniel Moulinet.

10 Liam Gillick, *The view constructed by the factory after it stopped producing cars*, 2005. Painted steel. Dimensions variable. Installation view, *Liam Gillick: A short text on the possibility of creating an economy of equivalence*, Palais de Tokyo, Paris, 2005. © Liam Gillick, 2005. Photo: © Daniel Moulinet.

11 Liam Gillick, *Mirrored Image: A 'Volvo' Bar*, 2008. Mixed media. Installation view, *Liam Gillick: Three Perspectives and a Short Scenario*, Kunstverein Munich, 2008. © Liam Gillick. Photo: © Wilfried Petzi.



extra windows in the walls and *The view constructed by the factory after it stopped producing cars*, both 2005; plate 8, plate 9 and plate 10) illustrate these endeavours, standing in effect as figures for both the workers' procrastination by way of 'aimless renovation', and as real detours from Gillick's own path towards the delayed production of the finished text itself.⁵¹ (Further allusions to the workers' procrastination were provided upon the show's relocation to La Casa Encendida, Madrid, in late 2005, where a café served free coffee and beer in the exhibition, and permission was granted to allow smoking.) The condition of the post-Fordist artist here parallels that of the post-Fordist factory workers, whose newfound redundancy is experienced as a similar crisis of flexibility, autonomy and social functionlessness. Like Gillick himself, they eventually find 'a way to alleviate the contradictions of their condition through a mass of paradoxes and mental games loaded on top of each other'.⁵²

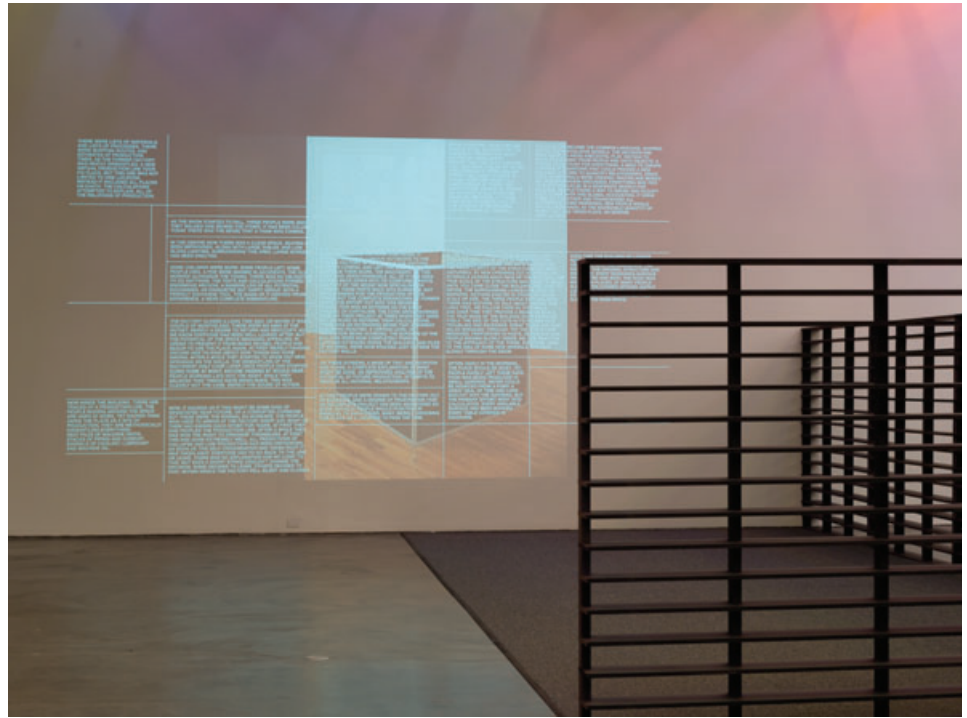


Illustrative structures of this kind remain exceptions to Gillick's many platforms and screens – works that, at least nominally, are intended as functionally incomplete support structures requiring activation through use, and that are thereby to be invested with further, extrinsic meaning. These inherently unfinished sculptures invoke the modernist insistence on centred, intrinsic aesthetic significance, at work in the theosophical fantasies of De Stijl, only to actively proscribe any contemporary possibility of the autotelic or monadic object. This condition was nowhere more effectively (and literally) dramatized than in the 'short scenario' that accompanied the 'three perspectives' of Gillick's touring exhibition of 2008–10. For this third act of the four-part project, a play, entitled *Mirrored Image: A 'Volvo' Bar*, was perpetually reworked in a series of eight performances at Kunstverein Munich between September and November 2008.⁵³ The exhibition space here became a stage set with the installation of a number of wooden-framed, primary-coloured monochrome screens mounted on wheels (plate 11). Haphazardly distributed and easily relocatable, some standing conveniently at shoulder height and others considerably taller, Gillick's abstract objects functioned as props or stations at which the numerous actors were to stand and rest while speaking, scripts in hand, with a view to reforming their assigned roles.

Beyond the provisional status of Gillick's sculptures themselves, the persistent relay between text and installation that is characteristic of Gillick's wider working practice emerges as the construction of feedback loops of continually displaced or deferred sense. Meaning pinballs between the novella of 1997 and the *Air de Paris* show in 1998, and between *Construcción de Uno* and the Palais de Tokyo exhibition of 2005. From there it reverberates across both media and projects. The artist's practice as a whole operates almost like the frantic assemblage of *Discussion Island/Big Conference Centre* writ large, as what Deleuze and Guattari themselves might have referred to as a 'method of segmentary acceleration or proliferation [that] connects the finite, the contiguous, the continuous, and the unlimited'.⁵⁴ The apotheosis of the endlessly delayed activity of *Discussion Island*'s trio of strategists – '[m]uddled and mobile' and '[c]aught in the centre ground' – is none other than the artist's labour itself, which is scarcely allowed to break free from its speculative, spiralling circularity.⁵⁵

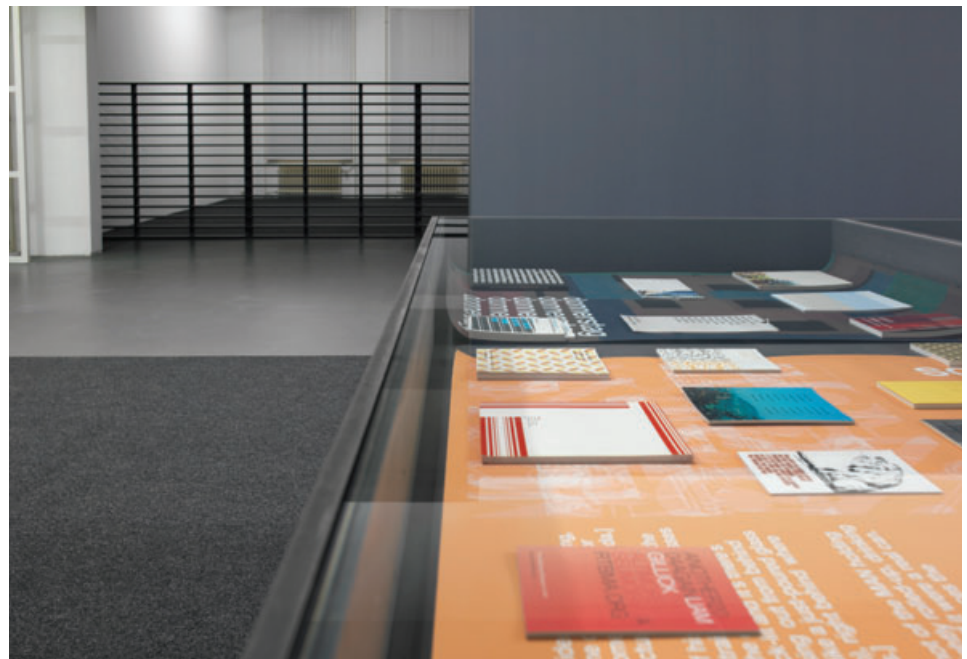
The many enigmatic text fragments plucked from Gillick's writings and displayed on the gallery

walls in his installations operate, in a sense, as levers, effecting this relay between publication and exhibition. Harnessing typefaces that are already highly coded as tropes of modern commercial design, Gillick inherits his occasional collaborator Lawrence Weiner's alertness to the possible materializations of language and the corresponding aestheticization of text as 'sculptural material'.⁵⁶ As Peter Osborne has argued, by prefiguring and pre-empting the institutional recuperation (and market valorization) of the material trace as the artistic object, Weiner's overt debt to experimental typography and to the angled spatial arrangements of El Lissitzky marked a more reflexive take on the potential fate of text in conceptual art of the late



12 Liam Gillick, *Three Perspectives and a Short Scenario*, 2008–10. Mixed media, with projected Apple Keynote documentary with sound. Dimensions variable. Installation view, *Liam Gillick: Three Perspectives and a Short Scenario*, Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, 2009. © Liam Gillick, 2009. Photo: Nathan Keay, © Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago.

13 Liam Gillick, *Three Perspectives and a Short Scenario*, 2008–10. Mixed media, with projected Apple Keynote documentary with sound. Dimensions variable. Installation view, *Liam Gillick: Three Perspectives and a Short Scenario*, Witte de With, Rotterdam, 2008. © Liam Gillick, 2008. Photo: © Bob Goedewaagen.



14 Liam Gillick, *Three Perspectives and a Short Scenario*, 2008–10. Mixed media, with projected Apple Keynote documentary with sound. Installation view, *Liam Gillick: Three Perspectives and a Short Scenario*, Witte de With, Rotterdam, 2008. © Liam Gillick, 2008. Photo: © Bob Goedewaagen.



1960s than Joseph Kosuth's insistence on the total dematerialization of art as pure concept or proposition.⁵⁷ That for Weiner, famously, 'the decision as to condition rests with the receiver upon the occasion of receivership', equally marked the artist's anticipation and blocking of any unproblematic or total rematerialization of the art object, effectively preventing any satisfactory resolution to the question of the location of the 'work' of art in either concept or object.⁵⁸ In a comparable spirit of indeterminacy, Gillick's frequent interposition of the material text fragment in his exhibitions withholds the determination of the semantic or ontological priority of either text or installation.

A similar indeterminacy was at work in the central video component of *Three Perspectives and a Short Scenario*. The exhibition's three perspectives were those of its three sites, beginning with concurrent exhibitions at Witte de With, Rotterdam and Kunsthalle Zurich from January to March 2008, and reprised at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, between October 2009 and January 2010, following the Munich intervention. At each of the principal three venues, a projected video (plate 12) and a vitrine displaying documentation of previous Gillick projects (plate 13) were enclosed within a large, grey MDF reconfiguration of the gallery space (plate 14), the video showing images of the artist's past visual and sculptural production superimposed and supplemented with written excerpts from *Construcción de Uno*. While promising to decode the visual material, the overlaid text in fact only subjected its possible significations, already myriad, to the unfolding trajectory of the *Construcción de Uno* quasi-narrative, that is, to further proliferation and deferral, and to the absent totality of the text.

Composed on Apple Keynote business software, the video made notable use of this program's standardized presentation features, ranging from its superimposition of images by an irregular lattice of white orthogonal boxes to contain the text, to the slow build, smooth lateral movement and fades of the text blocks themselves. In this way, the projection appeared to conflate the presentational format of the black-box or white-cube video installation with that of the grey office meeting room, suggesting the idea of the video retrospective as business promo or prospectus. Thus invoking notions of summary and projection, the video encapsulated the twin orientation

towards the past and the future that characterized the four-part project as a whole. This double temporality elaborated a homology between conditions of artistic practice and exhibition and a post-Fordist logic of production, conditions in each case intimately related to the computerization of culture, to which the centrepiece of Gillick's exhibition – the projected video – made clear reference.

Indeed, the poetics of new media operations are a further recurrent feature of Gillick's practice, as witnessed, for instance, by his redefinition of the role of exhibition designer as 'filter' in the context of curator Maria Lind's survey of contemporary 'design art', *What If*, at Moderna Museet, Stockholm, in 2000.⁵⁹ At least one reviewer of *Three Perspectives*, meanwhile, noted that the consistent emphasis on flattened planes throughout the Witte de With gallery space – not only the MDF partitions but also the vitrine and the projected screen – were suggestive of the reductive geometry that characterizes the two-dimensional simulations of three-dimensional space found in basic digital imaging.⁶⁰ More significantly, however, the sheer regularity of Gillick's horizontally slatted MDF frames bespoke their modularity: the possibility of their endless addition, subtraction and recombination, in short, their variability and adaptability to the specific architectural demands of each exhibition space. Discussing the tendency for software operations to become 'general ways of working, ways of thinking, and ways of existing in a computer age', Lev Manovich has written of modularity and variability as key principles of new media objects and post-Fordist production-on-demand alike, linked, of course, by the fact that computerization itself has made historically possible today's irregular and light-footed organization of manufacturing and distribution.⁶¹ Modularity – the divisibility of complex objects into combinations of smaller, regular units – makes possible the variability demanded by post-Fordist logics of customization.

In accordance with this variability of modular parts in Gillick's structure, a logic of customization itself was further cemented in *Three Perspectives* by Gillick's designation of those areas of the reconfigured exhibition space not reserved for the vitrine and video projection as 'institutional zones' whose control was, to differing degrees, ceded to the curatorial team at each venue. In Rotterdam, a series of artists' solo shows, selected without Gillick's consultation, was folded within the circuits of Gillick's exhibition; in Zurich the zone was given over to a series of Gillick's own performative and ephemeral works as well as special events; and in Chicago, a selection of Gillick's structures was installed. Like Gillick's unfinished platforms and screens, and like the perpetual rehearsal of his *short scenario*, the variability of *Three Perspectives* ensured that no single instantiation or performance of the show could be definitive; a further version or modulation is not only possible, but remains continuously inscribed in the logic of its constituent parts. Incompletion, an 'aesthetic of unfinish' of the kind ascribed to digital media in general by Peter Lunenfeld, is the condition of Gillick's inexhaustible exhibition.⁶²

Abstract Allegories of Abstraction

Bisecting part of the exhibition space at the Air de Paris show in 1998, the simultaneous three-dimensional articulation of space and Mondrian-like play of adjacent rectangular forms in Gillick's Plexiglas-and-aluminium *Big Conference Centre Legislation Screen* makes plain its conflation of references to minimalism and early modernist abstraction (plate 15). The critic Sven Lütticken has argued that this kind of conflation or overlapping of historical forms narrates the 'becoming-design' of abstraction during the twentieth century, whereby the visual form of abstract art gradually shifts from being a 'manifestation of sensuous thinking' to becoming the

‘implementation of a concept by coding or programming surfaces’.⁶³ The unity of thought and form in sensuous thinking, is – according to this narrative – subject to a progressive splitting in the history of modern art; a gradual separation of plan from execution. Gillick’s forms narrate, and thereby also enact, the completion of this trajectory, seeming to preclude the kind of aesthetic reason, urged by Adorno, that would ‘plunge blindfolded into the making of the work rather than directing it externally as an act of reflection over the artwork’.⁶⁴ To be sure, for Adorno, reflection was not simply opposed to ‘plunging’. Rather, his conception of art as ‘mimetic comportment’ takes reflection to be immanent to the logic of art that unfolds in the process of its making or composition. Guided by the inner nature of the materials at hand (language, colour and line, tone and rhythm and so forth) as well as the paradox of the subject’s simultaneous direction of, and acquiescence to, these materials and means, subject and object each come to be revealed through the other. ‘Construction’ is another of Adorno’s names for this immanent reflection, which, even as it tends towards an ‘expressionlessness ... that expresses the dawning powerlessness of expression’, remains something other than the perfunctory execution of a predefined method or procedure.⁶⁵ It is because ‘construction must conform to the mimetic impulses’, within the processual or compositional unfolding of the artwork’s immanent logic, that it stands opposed to planning as pure premeditation.⁶⁶ As Isabelle Graw observes, the understanding of mimesis as immanent reflection or construction is ‘one of modernism’s most important topoi’, and it is upon this process of construction that Gillick’s design-abstraction forecloses.⁶⁷

Gillick’s sculpture and installations quote and deploy the abstract forms of early Fordist- and late Fordist-era art in the service of a conceptual proposition: that they are the culmination of a process wherein the resistant forms of modernist abstraction have been forced to signify, corralled into the service of communication as the architecture of late capitalism and the logos of brand recognition. Red, orange and black Plexiglas, no less than wall-mounted Helvetica signage, are all so much Gillick-branding. As Lütticken implies, this condition can be understood as a specifically post-Fordist effect, insofar as its prizing apart of sensuous form and conceptual content shares in the particular logic of intensified abstraction that is at work in

15 Liam Gillick, *Big Conference Centre Legislation Screen*, 1998. Anodized aluminium, Plexiglas. Installation view, *Liam Gillick: Up on the twenty-second floor*, Air de Paris, Paris, 1998. © Liam Gillick, 1998. Photo: © DR, courtesy of Air de Paris.

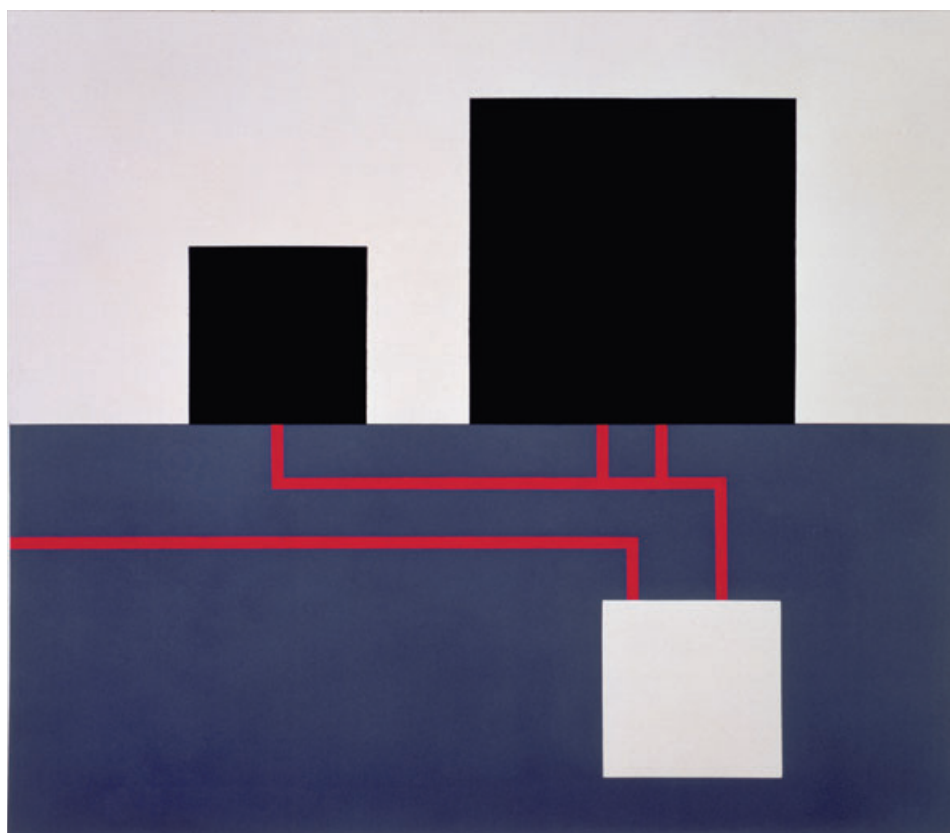


contemporary commodity production. To recap, post-Fordism has entailed the re-organization of processes of production both within the factory – the flattening of shop-floor hierarchies and the division of workers into small, semi-autonomous teams – as well as by way of outsourcing and the proliferation of networks of sub-contractors. Schematically put, the progressive separation of brand ownership from factory ownership and the concomitant dispersal or deterritorialization of the production of the commodity means that many of today's enterprises produce broadly similar products that accrue their differential speculative and sign-values (their 'brand equity') chiefly by way of a process of conceptual (post-)production: the construction of brand-meaning.⁶⁸ In this way, brands become not only key financial assets, but also a focus of major investment. Under post-Fordism's sway, there is an increase in proportional investment in the production of the 'cultural and informational content of the commodity', whereby the immaterial labour of brand-production, though merely supervenient on material production, comes to reap the greatest profit through the various channels of market speculation.⁶⁹ As a result, post-Fordism abstracts (material) product from (immaterial) meaning and value, and extends the Fordist abstraction of production from product. That is, production now becomes not merely subject to increasingly rationalized technical divisions of labour of the assembly line and self-regulatory small group, but ever more to an expanding social division of labour, of which the sharpening of the division between material (factory) production and immaterial (brand) production is only the most obvious form. The hegemony of the brand thus redoubles the alienation of commodity fetishism, understood as the process of the abstraction of the commodity from its real content, namely its origins in human labour. Responding to this process of relative abstraction or attenuation of the material and immaterial, Gillick's sculpture asserts that abstract visual form, as a result of the emergent hegemony of image- or brand-production, has gone the same way as discourse: fully absorbed into the false universality of a capitalistic logic of exchange and equivalence.

Gillick's installations and objects thus cannibalize the material environment of post-Fordist society and render its forms awkward and inert. But does this add up to an aesthetic, in the critical sense of an Adornian mediation of advanced technical forces of production with sensuous particularity, this last defined as singular resistance to all equivalence? If the historical fate of modernist abstraction is to have become the building blocks of our speculation-driven, post-Fordist brandscape, can the aesthetic be so easily adduced in this manner? For the Adorno of *Aesthetic Theory*, art's inner compulsion towards perpetual formal renewal is not only socially determined by the 'logic of production' at large, but also, on that basis, 'degenerative'.⁷⁰ In short, art's resistance to its fate is finite; it is progressively attenuated and finally liquidated. Taken in isolation, Gillick's overdetermined sculpture suggests, accordingly, that the advanced forces of post-Fordist abstraction have, by exploding the dialectical unity of the material-sensuous and immaterial-conceptual, finally surrendered the particularities of abstract form to the universal dictates of instrumental reason. By doing so, they suggest that capital has undercut that which, for Adorno, is the immanently critical aspect of the aesthetic itself, as a resistant stand against the radical separation of the sensuous and the rational.⁷¹

Prior to Gillick's professional emergence, the reckoning that capital's logic of equivalence had finally dispelled the possibility of a moment of aesthetic resistance had been a key factor in the anti-aesthetic strategies and theories of critical postmodernism in the 1980s. This was the theoretical terrain upon which numerous artists set out to appropriate and recombine pre-existing signs (and their sign-values)

16 Peter Halley, *Two Cells with Conduit and Underground Chamber*, 1983. Acrylic and Roll-A-Tex on canvas, 177.8 cm × 203.2 cm. © Peter Halley, 1983. Photo: Courtesy of Mary Boone Gallery, New York.



in a wholesale attempt to interrogate the aesthetic as little more than a cultural and ideological chimera.⁷² From this angle, Lütticken's account of Gillick's objects – as the self-narrating, now fully conceptual, endpoint of abstract art's becoming-design – would appear to confirm and re-mark the limit-point of any such resistance, staging that final surrender of the aesthetic to the exchange logic of post-Fordism, and its radical dislocation of form and content. Gillick's sculptural and installation practice would, on this basis, appear simply to re-enact this moment, as yet another move in the interminable endgame of abstraction, the kind of foreclosing of the aesthetic by the communicative that Peter Halley, for one, had already staged in his geometrical acrylic paintings of the 1980s (plate 16). Halley's paintings of this period and since are well known for their layering of references to modernist abstraction as well as the technological, material and organizational forms of late capitalist society, from circuit boards to offices, prisons and flowcharts. By these means, he implicates modernist utopianism and Enlightenment rationality more generally in its own dissolution. For Halley, the abstraction of geometry then becomes that which 'the managerial class reserves to communicate with itself'.⁷³

Lütticken flirts with the possibility that the competing significations of Gillick's sculpture might in fact threaten the breakdown of meaning; its buckling or collapse under the weight of the work's formal overdetermination. He finds, however, that the sculptures are prevented from enacting this kind of 'aesthetics of poverty', or even one of indeterminacy, by way of their 'failure ... to fully signify', since Gillick's texts force them to act as 'props in his post-Fordist drama'.⁷⁴ Sculpture in the mere service of text is, of course, the opposite of the avowed status of writing in the work of institutional-critique forebears such as Daniel Buren. Quoting Buren's notes from 1973, Alexander Alberro and Nora M. Alter have shown that Buren affirms an active



17 Daniel Buren, *Cabane éclatée*, 1996. Painted wood and mirrors. Cabin, 250 × 600 × 600 cm; nine mirrors, each 164 × 164 cm. Installation view, Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona, June 1996. © Daniel Buren, ADAGP, Paris, 2012. Photo: Martín García, courtesy of MACBA.

interplay between the visual and the textual in his works, while he also insists that 'it would be an absolute misinterpretation to forget which engenders the other'; that 'the process is from the work to the text', with the latter functioning, in effect, as a semantic supplement or guarantor of the work's political import.⁷⁵ Buren's rhetorical sleight of hand here attempts to both secure the critical self-sufficiency of his visual practice and to simultaneously ground it in his written justifications for the works' spatial game of give-and-take with the institutional/architectural container. But the difficult balance thus struck is prone to collapse into the simple overdetermination of the visual by the textual, as the real basis for what Alberro and Alter call Buren's 'guerrilla warfare against the dominant institutions of the art world'.⁷⁶ A number of Buren's *Cabanes éclatées* (exploded cabins or pavilions), produced since 1984, bear more than a passing resemblance to Gillick's own dispersed, quasi-architectural frameworks (plate 17), often making similar use of Plexiglas and steel supports; the case might be made for Gillick's 'prop' sculptures as an effective demystification of Buren's strategy, as both a revelation of the shortcomings of visual/spatial allegory as critique, and an exposure of a persistent intentional fallacy at work across Buren's critical reception.⁷⁷

Yet, rather than a one-way circumscription of sculpture by text, Gillick in fact sustains a complex dislocation between his various activities, and especially in his relays between text and sculpture. Relay, here, means the perpetual re-opening of a semantic gap that never allows the sculptural installations to fully resolve into the simple delivery of their eschatological thesis (the death of aesthetics as resistance).

In other words, critical postmodernism's refutation of aesthetics as resistance is the vanishing point towards which Gillick's practice relentlessly leads but, crucially, does not reach. To this extent, Gillick anticipates and shares in today's prevailing assessment that the critical force of that refutation has been decisively lost.⁷⁸

Gillick's visual and sculptural production therefore ought not to be taken to stand for his practice as a whole. It is, instead, a part within a more complex constellation of elements, which has the effect of relativizing the apparent claims of the sculpture itself. Gillick stages the liquidation of the resistant possibilities of abstract form, only to once more place postmodern resignation and historical closure in question. This, again, is where Gillick's melancholia shifts towards a sense of the provisionality and discontinuity of history, and where the allegorical ruins and fragments of modernism, on reflection, come to speak their own contingency, and the possibility of radical historical rupture, or at least piecemeal renewal.

A broadened perspective on Gillick must, then, look beyond the sculpture, not only to the texts, but towards the performative dimension of his artistic labour in *toto*, and specifically towards the dynamics of relay, deferral, dislocation and proliferation that I have been arguing are consistently at play in his work. The recovery of the aesthetic in Gillick may then proceed from what I have characterized as the incessant relay between objects and texts that typifies his practice. Relay is both bridge and unbridgeable gap, and, in this indeterminacy, it perpetually shuttles meaning out of the objects, as well as out of the texts, forcing it to circulate and proliferate endlessly, across object and text and from project to project. It is this dynamic that ceaselessly articulates and disarticulates his impossible position from the 'middle ground'.⁷⁹ This incessant relay or disappearance of meaning – meaning as that which constantly slips from view – might then be what finally holds the door open to the aesthetic as indeterminacy, or, better, as a stubborn conceptual and anti-conceptual resistance to meaning and to the total semantic lockdown of post-Fordist equivalence. This would help to explain why, as Lütticken concedes, Gillick's objects are only ever 'quasi-illustrations of his discourse'.⁸⁰ Equally, however, so too is his 'discourse' only ever the quasi-illustration of the objects. Besides which, insofar as Gillick's text-assemblages are concerned, 'discourse' is a clear misnomer. Discourse constantly dismantles itself to become discursive. In *Discussion Island/Big Conference Centre* especially, as I have shown, discourse is that which is accelerated and heated up until it becomes a mirage of itself.

Conclusion

... the idea of being able to determine the speed with which you produce a car, whether you produce it in a group or individually, at night, or very slowly, seems close to the question of how to make art over the last fifty years.⁸¹

Here, in his essay *Maybe it would be better if we worked in groups of three?*, Gillick again invokes the revolutionary 'flexible production system' inaugurated at Kalmar, where flexibility meant efficiency and a more stealthy exploitation rather than emancipation, and for the small-group workers (according to contemporary Volvo publicity) amounted to little more than their ability to 'set their own working schedule and coffee breaks within the overall limits'.⁸² Gillick's opaque statement may be read as a recognition that while flexibilization is the condition of his practice's aesthetic autonomy, this autonomy – like any other within a general situation of

alienated social relations – is internally divided. It necessarily includes its non-aesthetic, heteronomous dimension. Indeed, flexibility itself cuts both ways. It by no means preordains resistance, but is the very secret of the post-Fordist factory's economic success story. Flexibility thus pinpoints the shrunken distance between alienated and artistic labour, detailed by Boltanski and Chiapello, that is the locus of Gillick's entire problematic.

In Gillick, flexibility means the recombination of the symbolic forms of modernist abstraction, minimalist sculpture, corporate design and management-speak in his texts and objects, together with his continual multitasking shuffle of media, formats and models of exhibition and commission, into a ceaseless flow of diffuse projects that enact the post-Fordist abstraction of production from product. Yet there is an additional question of visibility at stake here, turning on the function and ontology of branded identity; a further (Adornian) attenuation that nowadays places art's immanent critique in ever greater jeopardy. A principal function of brands is to construct an identity; that is, not merely a clear and communicable idea, but a clear and communicable idea that is sellable and consumable because it is incorporated and unified.⁸³ To do this, brands submit the substance of their construction – the innumerable, outsourced, deterritorialized corporations, companies, processes, actors, and range of products, together with the full range of ethical and political problematics that attend each of these – to a single, digestible style or pseudo-concept. They smooth over and make invisible the gaps, disjunctions and contradictions between parts that are the real matter of post-Fordist production.

Gillick's parallel between factory labour and artistic labour, quoted above, thus has far-reaching implications for the politics of his post-Fordist aesthetics. For no matter what form factory labour takes, no matter how collective or dispersed its organization, production within its walls remains capital's 'hidden abode'.⁸⁴ Its product, the fetish of the commodity, tirelessly obscures these origins. Gillick's aesthetics, his own drive to infinite displacement, necessarily runs counter to, and is ever effaced by, his own brand identity. The (synchronic) disjunction between parts, and the (diachronic) proliferation of elements that unravels and abstracts the flow of Gillick's production from its substantive products, is finally held together by the Gillick-brand.⁸⁵ Disjunction itself, buffered by the marked visual consistency of his products, becomes the commodity-sign of the artist's opacity and political ambiguity. In other words, the post-Fordist abstraction of production from product enacted by Gillick's text-object relay is repeated or redoubled by the artist at the level of brand-production. This in turn abstracts, or rather, extracts, the production of commodified brand-meaning from that of aesthetic non-meaning. Indeterminacy is folded into image.

Within these inescapable limits, Gillick continually pushes against the threat of the loss of aesthetic non-identity to the equivalence of the brand. It may be this last dynamic or tension that not only cannot be fully completed or resolved, but which, by the same token, also demands to be continually re-posed. It may be the interminability of the endgame, after all, that finally compels and propels the endless proliferation of elements that constitutes Gillick's practice as it constantly attempts to outrun and escape itself. That this strategy of overproduction is notably difficult to disentangle from the careerism of a branded, individualized practice, propelled by the self-determined demand for an endless proliferation of product, marks precisely the emasculated contemporary condition of art as immanent critique. If the readily digestible identity of the brand is but a primary symptom of a deeper cultural logic that thrives on distraction and incessant disruption, and if, as Gillick's

work suggests, the only adequate response to this is the intensified indeterminacy and disjunctive brand of a post-Fordist aesthetics, then resistance today is precarious indeed. If the Adornian defence of Gillick holds, it is precisely because aesthetic resistance for Adorno is nothing if not radically attenuated, indeed exactly dependent on art's dialectical intimacy with the commodity form. For Adorno, the resistance of aesthetic experience transpired through the fetishistic 'patience and perseverance of lingering with the particular', but Gillick's delays never settle to a pause, and it is difficult to figure his practice as a model of deceleration.⁸⁶ Occupying and ceaselessly reoccupying an infinitely receding space of aesthetic resistance, it is a practice in every sense amenable to speculation.

Notes

An earlier and shorter version of this article was delivered at the session 'Art in Neoliberalism', at Historical Materialism 2010, School of Oriental and African Studies, London, 12 November 2010. I would like to thank the session convenor, Gail Day, as well as Julian Stallabrass and my anonymous reviewers for their valuable comments, Sam Bibby and the editorial team of Art History for their kind assistance, and the Association of Art Historians for their generous grant towards image costs.

- 1 A short sample of recent book and journal titles will suffice to indicate this currency within the fields of art criticism and theory: Pascal Gielen, *The Murmuring of the Artistic Multitude: Global Art, Memory and Post-Fordism*, Amsterdam, 2009; the annual Milan-based journal *No Order: Art in a Post-Fordist Society*, founded in 2010; and Julieta Aranda, Anton Vidokle and Brian Kuan Wood, eds, *Are You Working Too Much? Post-Fordism, Precarity and the Labor of Art*, Berlin, 2011.
- 2 See David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*, Malden, MA and Oxford, 1989, 141–72.
- 3 *Everything Good Goes* was first shown at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, in 2008, at the exhibition of the Vincent Award.
- 4 Liam Gillick, 'Maybe it would be better if we worked in groups of three', 2009, <http://www.liamgillick.info/home/texts/maybe-it-would-be-better-to-work-in-groups-of-three>, accessed 17 November 2010.
- 5 See Bertolt Brecht, 'A short organum for the theatre', in Bertolt Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic*, ed. and trans. John Willett, London, 1964, 179–205; and Walter Benjamin, 'What is the epic theatre? (II)', in Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings Volume 4: 1938–1940*, ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings, trans. Edmund Jephcott and others, Cambridge, MA and London, 2003, 302–9.
- 6 Stewart Martin, 'Being Liam Gillick', *Mute*, 11 November 2009, http://www.metamute.org/en/content/being_liam_gillick, accessed 25 November 2011.
- 7 See Monika Szewczyk, ed., *Meaning Liam Gillick*, Cambridge, MA and London, 2009. For good general surveys of Gillick's work, see Michael Archer, 'Parallel structures', in Susanne Gaensheimer and Nicolaus Schafhausen, eds, *Liam Gillick*, Cologne, 2000, 131–42; and Lilian Haberer, 'Parallel thinking between structure and fiction', in Liam Gillick and Lilian Haberer, eds, *Factories in the Snow*, Zurich, 2007, 2–46. The most comprehensive document of Gillick's career to date is the catalogue to the artist's recent mid-career retrospective in Bonn. See exhib. cat., *One long walk... Two short piers*, Kunst- und Ausstellungshalle der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, Bonn, 2010.
- 8 Nancy Fraser, 'From discipline to flexibilization? Rereading Foucault in the shadow of globalization', *Constellations*, 10: 2, June 2003, 169.
- 9 See Brian Holmes, 'The flexible personality: For a new cultural critique', 2001, <http://transform.eicpc.net/transversal/1106/holmes/en#redir>, accessed 1 December 2010.
- 10 Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, eds Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedeman, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor, London and New York, 2004, 6.
- 11 John Roberts has addressed the contemporary limitations of Adorno's insistence on the integrity of the discrete, unreproducible artwork as the ultimate point of convergence of 'advanced technical relations of production' and 'advanced technical relations of art'. Roberts argues for a 're-radicalization' of Adorno's aesthetics that would extend his foundational account of aesthetic autonomy as a 'critical expression of the relations between aesthetic reason and non-aesthetic reason', opening this up to forms of 'distributive, sociable and interventionist' practice, and to 'set[s] of activities or processes'. John Roberts, *The Intangibilities of Form: Skill and Deskilling in Art after the Readymade*, London and New York, 2007, 31, 222, 31, 223, Roberts's emphasis.
- 12 See Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming, London and New York, 1997.
- 13 See the artist's comments in Liam Gillick, 'The semiotics of the built world', in exhib. cat., *Liam Gillick: The Wood Way*, Whitechapel Art Gallery, London, 2002, 80; and Liam Gillick, 'The good of work', *e-flux journal*, 16, May 2010, <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/view/142>, accessed 9 May 2011.
- 14 Liam Gillick, 'Berlin statement', in Liam Gillick, *How are You Going to Behave? A Kitchen Cat Speaks*, Berlin and New York, 2009, 98; Liam Gillick, edited transcript of the text spoken in the projected video *Everything Good Goes*, 2008, quoted in Monika Szewczyk, 'Introduction', in Szewczyk, ed., *Meaning Liam Gillick*, xxiii.
- 15 Luc Boltanski and Ève Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Gregory Elliott, London and New York, 2005, 155, 312.
- 16 Boltanski and Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, xxii, 110, Boltanski and Chiapello's emphasis.
- 17 Gillick, *How are You Going to Behave?*, 100.
- 18 Gillick, *How are You Going to Behave?*, 111.
- 19 Liam Gillick, 'Contingent factors: A response to Claire Bishop's "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics"', in Liam Gillick, *Proxemics: Selected Writings (1988–2006)*, ed. Lionel Bovier, Zurich and Dijon, 2006, 160, originally published in *October*, 115, Winter 2006, 95–107.
- 20 For an astute analysis of the conflicted significations of design for contemporary art, though one that underplays the emancipatory aspect of design for Gillick himself, see Sven Lütticken, 'Under the sign of design', *Texte zur Kunst*, 18: 72, December 2008, 115–22.
- 21 Liam Gillick, 'For a functional utopia', 2003, <http://www.liamgillick.info/home/texts/for-a-functional-utopia>, accessed 21 September 2011. Peter Wollen discusses Gillick's position on the relation of utopian speculation to progressive thought, in Peter Wollen, 'Thought experiments', *Parkett*, 61, 2001, 76–82.
- 22 Gillick, *Proxemics*, 164. Though he maintains this distinction, Gillick has also acknowledged his debt to the Galerie Christian Nagel artists. See Gillick's comments in Cliff Lauson, 'Separate but not marginal: A conversation with Liam Gillick', *Third Text*, 22: 2, March 2008, 275.
- 23 Challenging Claire Bishop's unfavourable comparison of his work with that of Thomas Hirschhorn, Gillick alludes to his interest in Deleuze when he writes: 'There is a difference between reading Gilles Deleuze and putting a Deleuze book in your work.' Gillick, *Proxemics*, 157. Bishop's discussion of Gillick appears in Claire Bishop, 'Antagonism and relational aesthetics', *October*, 110, Fall 2004, 51–79. The phrase 'intensive multiplicity' belongs to Deleuze and Guattari, as that which is 'ceaselessly transformed, and [which] cannot be divided

- or transformed without [...] elements changing in nature each time'. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. Brian Massumi, London and New York, 2004, 34.
- 24 On the implementation of neoliberalism beginning in the 1970s, see David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, Oxford, 2005, 39–63.
 - 25 For an indication of the importance of post-autonomist Marxism within current debates on post-Fordism, see the essays collected in Gal Kirn, ed., *Post-Fordism and its Discontents*, Maastricht, Ljubljana and Berlin, 2010.
 - 26 See Maurizio Lazzarato, 'Immaterial labour', trans. Paul Colilli and Ed Emory, in Michael Hardt and Paolo Virno, eds, *Radical Thought in Italy: A Potential Politics*, Minneapolis, MN, 1996, 133–47.
 - 27 Scott Lash, *Critique of Information*, London, Thousand Oaks, CA and New Delhi, 2002, 10, 1, xii.
 - 28 John Kelsey, 'Escape from Discussion Island', in Szewczyk, ed., *Meaning Liam Gillick*, 67, 65, 59. The phrase 'assemblage of enunciation' is Deleuze and Guattari's, as that which 'always has a line of escape by which it escapes itself and makes its enunciations or its expressions take flight and disarticulate, no less than its contents that deform or metamorphose'. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, trans. Dana Polan, Minneapolis, MN and London, 1986, 86.
 - 29 Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 52; Gillick, *Proxemics*, 164. For an elucidation of Adorno's dialectical advance upon the Nietzschean (and, subsequently, the poststructuralist) tendency towards a pure opposition between universality and particularity, identity and non-identity, see Peter Dews, *The Limits of Disenchantment: Essays on Contemporary European Philosophy*, London, 1996, 19–38.
 - 30 Gillick, 'Maybe it would be better'.
 - 31 Gillick, *How are You Going to Behave?*, 97.
 - 32 'discursive', Oxford English Dictionary, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/54094?redirectedFrom=discursive#eid>, accessed 6 May 2011. Discursivity, in this sense, closely approaches the kind of parataxis that, as Shierry Weber Nicholsen has argued, is the very 'basis' of configuration in Adorno's sense, as a mode of 'logicity', 'in which serial transition replaces logical connection' within the form of a 'semblance of logical continuity' that 'provokes but does not resolve reflection'. Shierry Weber Nicholsen, *Exact Imagination, Late Work: On Adorno's Aesthetics*, Cambridge, MA and London, 1997, 83, 124, 83, 98, 124.
 - 33 Gillick, 'Maybe it would be better'.
 - 34 Liam Gillick, *Discussion Island/Big Conference Centre*, Ludwigsburg and Derry, 1997, republished in Liam Gillick, *All Books*, London, 2009, 159.
 - 35 Gillick, *All Books*, 197, 144, 150.
 - 36 Gillick, *All Books*, 141.
 - 37 The *What If? Scenarios* are collected in exhib. cat., *Liam Gillick: McNamara Papers, Erasmus and Ibuka! Realisations, The What If? Scenarios*, Le Consortium, Dijon and Kunstverein Hamburg, Hamburg, 1997, 81–95.
 - 38 Gillick, *All Books*, 193.
 - 39 Gillick, *How are You Going to Behave?*, 101; Gillick, *All Books*, 166.
 - 40 Gillick, *All Books*, 147.
 - 41 See Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka*, 22, 36.
 - 42 Gillick, *All Books*, 169, 184. See Gillick, *Proxemics*, 160, 162, 163.
 - 43 Gillick, *All Books*, 184.
 - 44 Gillick, *All Books*, 161.
 - 45 Ina Blom, *On the Style Site: Art, Sociality, and Media Culture*, Berlin and New York, 2007, 150; Gillick, *All Books*, 141.
 - 46 Text fragments from *Construcción de Uno* appeared between October 2004 and April 2005 under the auspices of the Vienna-based organization, museum in progress, overlaid on a series of images and displayed on backlit 'rolling' advertisement boards and digital information screens in public locations around Vienna, as well as featuring as full-page spreads in the Austrian broadsheet *Der Standard*. More recently, fragments appeared on the runway benches at luxury knitwear brand Pringle of Scotland's women's show at London Fashion Week, 19 September 2011, ahead of the launch of a range of Gillick-designed Pringle accessories at Art Basel Miami Beach in November 2011. For details of each project, see exhib. cat., *Print/Out: 20 Years in Print*, Museum of Modern Art, New York, 2012, and <http://brand.pringleofscotland.com/projects/liam-gillick/>, accessed 12 June 2012.
 - 47 Liam Gillick, *Construcción de Uno* (2004–), text excerpt projected in video component of the exhibition, *Three Perspectives and a Short Scenario*, Witte de With, Rotterdam, Kunsthalle Zurich and Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, 2008–2010.
 - 48 Anon., 'Tate Triennial 2006. Liam Gillick. Construcción de Uno (Prequel)' (press release), <http://www.e-flux.com/shows/view/2862>, accessed 9 May 2011; Gillick, *Construcción de Uno*.
 - 49 Gillick, *Construcción de Uno*.
 - 50 Gillick, *Construcción de Uno*.
 - 51 'Reoccupation, Recuperation and Aimless Renovation' was the title of the third of Gillick's 'Five Short Texts on the Possibility of Creating an Economy of Equivalence' delivered at Anton Vidokle's free art school, *unitednationsplaza*, in Berlin in 2007. See <http://www.unitednationsplaza.org/>.
 - 52 Gillick, *Construcción de Uno*.
 - 53 See Liam Gillick, *Ein kurzes Szenario: A 'Volvo' Bar*, 8. August 1993, Munich, 2008.
 - 54 Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka*, 58.
 - 55 Gillick, *All Books*, 161, 167.
 - 56 Peter Osborne, 'Survey', in Peter Osborne, ed., *Conceptual Art*, London and New York, 2002, 32. Gary Hustwit's documentary film, *Helvetica* (2007), details the rise to ubiquity of Max Miedinger's and Eduard Hoffmann's eponymous typeface, first licenced in 1957 and once described (in its italicized variant) by another of its appropriators, John Knight, as 'the ultimate mainstream corporate font'. John Knight, quoted in Benjamin Buchloh, 'Knight's moves' (1986), in Benjamin Buchloh, *Neo-Avantgarde and Culture Industry*, Cambridge, MA and London, 2000, 298.
 - 57 See Osborne, 'Survey', and Joseph Kosuth, 'Art after philosophy', in Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson, eds, *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*, Cambridge, MA and London, 1999, 158–77.
 - 58 Lawrence Weiner, 'Statement of Intent', 1969, quoted in Osborne, 'Survey', 31.
 - 59 See exhib. cat., *What If: Art on the Verge of Architecture and Design*, Moderna Museet, Stockholm, 2000.
 - 60 See Katie Kitamura, 'Liam Gillick', *frieze*, 114, April 2008, 175.
 - 61 Lev Manovich, *The Language of New Media*, Cambridge, MA and London, 2001, 118.
 - 62 Peter Lunenfeld, 'Unfinished business', in Peter Lunenfeld, ed., *The Digital Dialectic: New Essays on New Media*, Cambridge, MA and London, 1999, 11.
 - 63 Sven Lütticken, '(Stop) Making Sense', in Szewczyk, ed., *Meaning Liam Gillick*, 37, 36.
 - 64 Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 151.
 - 65 Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 54.
 - 66 Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 55.
 - 67 Isabelle Graw, 'Adorno is among us', in Nicolaus Schafhausen, Vanessa Joan Müller and Michael Hirsch, eds, *Adorno: The Possibility of the Impossible*, New York and Berlin, 2003, 13. One indication of this importance for modernist aesthetics in general is the correspondence between Adorno's characterization of mimetic comportment and Maurice Blanchot's theory of inspiration as an abnegation of the authorial subject confronted with the singular force of the work in the process of its emergence. Despite their divergences, each principle, in its way, suggests a move away from the Romantic emphasis on the author's interiority, and towards the modernist primacy and autonomy of artistic form itself. See Maurice Blanchot, *The Space of Literature*, trans. Ann Smock, Lincoln, NE and London, 1982, and Timothy Clark, 'Contradictory passion: Inspiration in Blanchot's *The Space of Literature*', *SubStance*, 25: 1, 1996, 46–61.
 - 68 For a comprehensive theory of branding as a 'capitalist response to the hypermediatization of the social that prevails in informational capitalism', see Adam Arvidsson, *Brands: Meaning and Value in Media Culture*, Abingdon and New York, 2006, 136.
 - 69 Lazzarato, in Hardt and Virno, eds, *Radical Thought in Italy*, 132.
 - 70 Jay Bernstein, 'Speculation, art and politics', in Simon Jarvis, ed., *Theodor W. Adorno: Critical Evaluations in Cultural Theory, Volume IV*, London and New York, 2007, 87.
 - 71 As Adorno puts it, 'art is the most compelling argument against the epistemological division of sensuality and intellect.' Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 228.
 - 72 See Hal Foster's introduction in Hal Foster, ed., *Postmodern Culture*,

- London, 1998, ix–xvii.
- 73 Peter Halley, 'The crisis in geometry', in *Arts*, Summer 1984, 115.
Hal Foster provides what remains the most perceptive critique of the 'triumphal defeatism' of Halley and other 'neo-geo' practices of the 1980s, in Hal Foster, *The Return of the Real*, Cambridge, MA and London, 1996, 98–124.
 - 74 Lütticken, in Szewczyk, ed., *Meaning Liam Gillick*, 40.
 - 75 Daniel Buren, 'Preface: Why write texts or the place from where I act', in exhib. cat., *5 Texts*, John Weber Gallery, New York, trans. Patricia Railing, 7, quoted in Alexander Alberro and Nora M. Alter, 'Staging the political: Repetition, difference, and Daniel Buren's *Cabanes Éclatées*', *Grey Room*, 40, Summer 2010, 7.
 - 76 Alberro and Alter, 'Staging the political', 19.
 - 77 Guy Lelong, for instance, makes the uneasy claim that Buren's 'constant preoccupation with explanation is not in contradiction with the fact that his pieces can be understood by themselves', but that 'only explanation is capable of dissipating misunderstanding', and so 'it is advisable to constantly reaffirm what is blatantly clear'. Guy Lelong, 'The place of the written word', in Guy Lelong, ed., *Daniel Buren*, trans. David Radzinowicz, Paris, 2002, 78.
 - 78 T. J. Clark has recently put this down to a simple generational waning of the expectation that anti-aesthetic mimicry of the capitalist sensorium might 'carry within it the seeds of negation and critique', in the face of a renewed investment in the 'possibility of at least partial escape from the time and place of the slogan, the sound bite, the sentence'. T. J. Clark, 'The end of the anti-aesthetic', *Texte zur Kunst*, 21: 81, March 2011, 163, 164. Gail Day, meanwhile, makes the incisive argument that postmodern proclamations of the total subsumption of use value by exchange value – arising from Frankfurt School critical theory and crystallized (and reified), via the 'metaphoric imprecision' of Guy Debord and Jean Baudrillard, in the work of Benjamin Buchloh and Fredric Jameson – were always premised on the false opposition of what is intelligible only as a dialectical coupling. Gail Day, *Dialectical Passions: Negation in Postwar Art Theory*, New York and Chichester, West Sussex, 2011, 210.
 - 79 Gillick, *How are You Going to Behave?*, 107.
 - 80 Lütticken, in Szewczyk, ed., *Meaning Liam Gillick*, 40.
 - 81 Gillick, 'Maybe it would be better'.
 - 82 *The Volvo Group of Companies*, corporate brochure, Gothenburg, 1974, 23.
 - 83 On this function, see Wally Olins, *The Brand Handbook*, London, 2008, and Naomi Klein, *No Logo: Taking Aim at the Brand Bullies*, London, 2000.
 - 84 Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy: Volume One*, trans. Ben Fowkes, London, 1990, 279.
 - 85 A useful comparison may be drawn here with Miwon Kwon's argument that '[it] is now the performative aspect of an artist's characteristic mode of operation ... that is repeated and circulated as a new art commodity'. Miwon Kwon, *One Place after Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity*, Cambridge, MA and London, 2004, 47, Kwon's emphasis.
 - 86 Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections on a Damaged Life*, trans. E. F. N. Jephcott, London and New York, 2005, 77. In this way, the 'truth content of artworks ... is predicated on their fetish character'. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 298. Stewart Martin discusses the relation, in Adorno, between commodity fetishism and the fetishism of autonomous art, in his 'The absolute artwork meets the absolute commodity', *Radical Philosophy*, 146, November–December 2007, 15–25.

Burnout: Liam Gillick's Post-Fordist Aesthetics

Bill Roberts

The work of British artist Liam Gillick (born 1964) offers a quintessential model of a flexible, multifaceted, project-based practice, while a number of his key works thematize contemporary post-Fordist production more widely. Examining the complex inter-articulation of Gillick's artistic labour and his allusive portrayal of broader conditions of production, this essay constructs a picture of Gillick's 'post-Fordist aesthetics' by focusing on activities related to the artist's 1997 novella *Discussion Island/Big Conference Centre*, as well as the research project, *Construcción de Uno*, ongoing since 2004. The performative dimension of Gillick's artistic labour is revealed to be key to an understanding of his practice; the sovereignty of discrete works is constantly thwarted by Gillick's dynamics of proliferation and delay, and a perpetual relay between exhibition and text. By systematically attending to the constellational interplay of the various elements of Gillick's work, a clearer picture can thus be formed of a practice that enacts a 'flexibilized' divergence from, and convergence with, the very cultural logic that it seeks to diagnose.

Bill Roberts completed his PhD at the Courtauld Institute of Art in 2010, with a thesis entitled 'Human Resources: Artistic Labour and the Limits of Critique in North American and Western European Art of the 1990s'. He has published in *immediations*, *Journal of Visual Culture*, *Third Text* and *Tate Papers* and has been a visiting tutor in History and Theory of Art at the Ruskin School of Drawing and Fine Art, University of Oxford, since 2010.