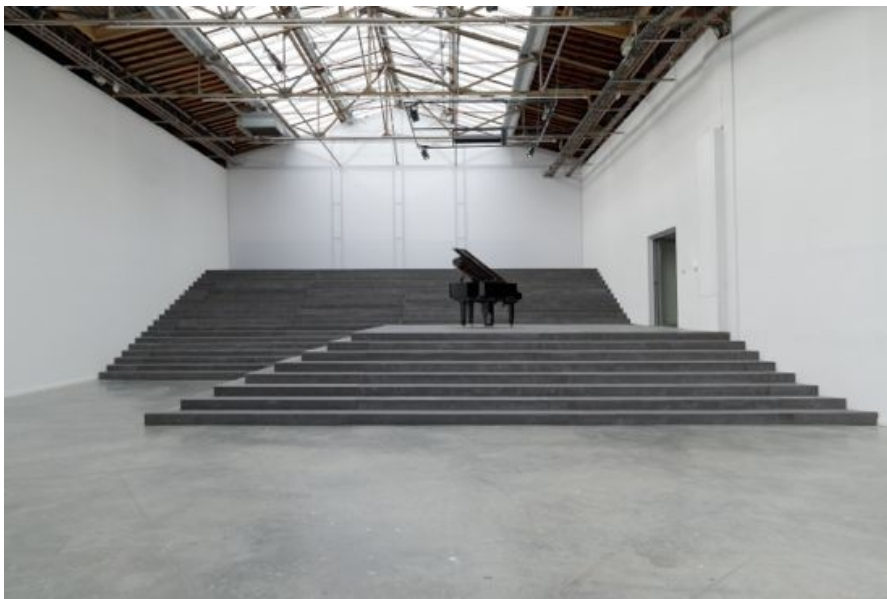


Liam Gillick, Pt I

ON A CERTAIN DAY IN A CERTAIN PLACE AND TIME

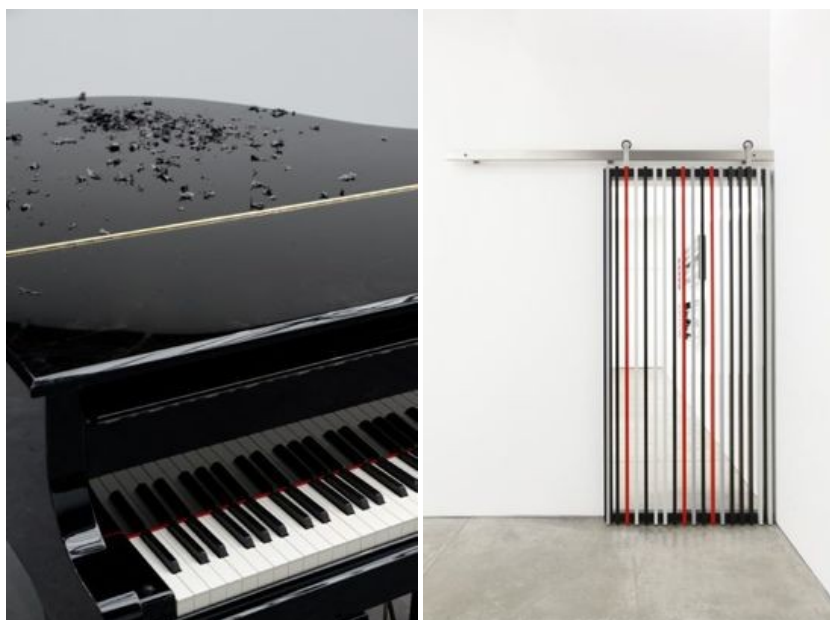
By Andrew Maerkle



Liam Gillick – *Factories in the snow* (2007), exhibition view in Philippe Parreno: "Anywhere, Anywhere, Out Of The World," Palais de Tokyo, 2013. Photo Aurélien Mole.

Born in England in 1964 and now based in New York, Liam Gillick works across diverse media, but is perhaps best known for his sculptural installations in which materials from the everyday built environment are transformed into both ironic, minimalist abstractions and powerful commentaries on the structures guiding behavior, and thought, in contemporary society. Extending his practice to architecture, graphic design, films and videos, Gillick is also a prolific writer of texts and books that inform his visual art projects without explicating them. Taking the form of speculative fiction or art and social criticism, the texts might contribute to the development of a body of work, but both texts and works operate in parallel to each other, rather than in a specific hierarchy.

Gillick recently visited Japan for the opening of his exhibition at Taro Nasu Gallery in Tokyo, "Vertical Disintegration," held from November 28 to December 27. As part of our annual special issue reviewing the events of the past year and looking ahead to the year to come, "Things Worth Remembering 2013," ART iT met with Gillick at the gallery to discuss the role of time in his practice and thinking.



Left: Detail of *Factories in the snow* (2007) at Palais de Tokyo, 2013. Photo Aurélien Mole. **Right:** *Scorpion then Felix* (2012), powder coated aluminium; installation: 220 x 200 x 10 cm aprox; door: 210 x 100 x 10 cm. Installation view, Taro Nasu, Tokyo, 2013. Courtesy Liam Gillick and Taro Nasu, Tokyo.

ART IT: It's funny you mention that you're staying at the Hotel Okura, the interior of which is like a time warp to a very specific period in postwar Japanese sensibility, because one of the topics I wanted to discuss with you is the idea of time and how it applies to your practice and thinking. From notions of historical time to labor time to parallel time and time travel, time seems fundamental in many ways to your concerns, but it also seems to be something that you work around as opposed to using directly.

LG: Yes. Philippe Parreno has an exhibition now in Paris at the Palais de Tokyo, ["Anywhere, Anywhere, Out of the World"], where he plays quite directly with time. For me, the problem is often expressed in a way that's more still or stable, in the same way that the Okura has a particular atmosphere. This is partly to do with my placement of objects, as well as a conceptual element: the existence of physical objects rather than the expression of time in a clear way. I think Philippe is questioning the exhibition as a site where you might not know how much time to spend there – he is trying to play with exhibition time. My issue with time is less to do with the exhibition as a space, and more to do with what I'm thinking about when I'm working.

But I have to say my previous visit to Tokyo affected me very strongly – I took a lot of photographs – and that's happening again. So my certainty has started to disappear, which is good for me, but it changes something, and I don't know what that is exactly. I know this seems a strange thing to say, because obviously Tokyo is just another modern city, but maybe there are elements of inside and outside that get confused here. There's something about the design of objects in Tokyo and the particular trajectory of modernism that they reflect. I'm going through a phase of testing some ideas at the moment, so many of the certainties I had, or the areas that interested me, are not so clear any more. I'm trying to look more, to check and verify things rather than build a big conceptual construction and say, ok, this is a big set of ideas and here's the work. I'm going back to more physical things. I'm trying to be less in my head and more concentrated on the way things are made. This is a good city for doing that.

ART IT: This confusion of inside and outside could apply to the sliding door piece in the exhibition here, *Scorpion then Felix* (2012), which divides the two galleries. When I entered the exhibition space, the door had been left open, so I could see into the interior room and have some sense of looking through a pictorial frame, but without being particularly conscious of the relation between the door and the space beyond it. It was only when I shut the door and looked again through its bars into the interior that all of a sudden a scene materialized. Looking through the partial obstruction of the door completed the space.

LG: Exactly. I think what happens when I come here is that I become aware of the fact that I still have a lot to learn or understand. This has nothing to do with Japanese culture or history or architecture in a specific way, and more to do with how space is used and divided and how, when space is valuable – meaning literally that there's not much of it – new views are created through screens or barriers that play with the perception of space.

So coming back to your question about time – time or duration is normally the thing I'm really thinking about, but when I come here, I'm forced to think about space and deception, too. In Tokyo, looking at the spaces between everything, you're not sure how deep something is or how wide it is or how far it continues, because there's the effect of what Donald Judd used to

call "real illusion," where devices are used to suggest that there might be something more or beyond, when in fact there might just be a wall, or a narrow void. So, for this exhibition, instead of coming to Tokyo, looking at the gallery and making new work, I wanted to stay away at first, then bring work from outside and start to think of new ways to produce something that will appear later somewhere else. My stay here will lead to a displacement. My time in Tokyo now will affect the exhibition I do in Germany next year.

ART iT: This recalls the scenario for your novel *Erasmus is Late*, in which parallel times coexist in the same space.

LG: It does. I was watching television this morning and saw the news about Caroline Kennedy's arrival as the new United States Ambassador to Japan. The Okura is right next to the Embassy and she came to the hotel for some kind of diplomatic courtesy call, but of course what's also happening there is that the hotel was built [in 1962] just before the death of President Kennedy, so there are a lot of strange parallels and time slips taking place. Maybe what I'm looking for at the moment is a subject. The experience of staying in the Hotel Okura, with all this activity and symbolic politics and symbolic architecture, turns me into a ghost in the room, because I'm invisible there - I'm just a guest. I have my camera out - but so do many others - and if I have a camera then it means I am only taking a few photos. I'm killing time. I'm standing there and people walk right through me. Yesterday all these diplomats and people were weaving around me and I was standing silently as if I didn't exist. It's a good place to not exist. People leave you alone. So it's a good time to think, and look for a subject.

ART iT: You often describe your works as parallel positions, and the way you describe the Okura sounds as if it's a gigantic parallel position. But in terms of your work, is it possible for there to be time in a parallel position?

LG: Yes, it is possible. It's a complicated thing to explain. I wrote about it in depth last year, but you would need to have the whole text to understand what I was talking about. The point is that this all depends on the point of view. Imagine you have parallel strands of ideas or thinking. If you look at them one way, there seem to be separate points, but from another angle ideas appear to intersect.

Maybe what I'm talking about is not finding a new subject but finding a new point of view. For the last days I've been playing with isometric projection, used when you draw a building with no perspective, a technique which also appears in older Japanese art. In the old prints, for example, the front of a building and the back of a building will be the same length, because the artist was trying to show all the information in the image with no distortion of perspective. Maybe what will happen with this parallel thinking is that the time component of my work will change if I change my point of view.

But in the end I'm not sure. I'm in a period of doubt about a lot of things. This is partly because I just started making a film with a French filmmaker who previously did some work with Godard and made a great film about surgeons. He wants to make a film about an artist who is played by different artists at different ages. I'm the middle artist, because I'm 20 years older than the youngest one and 20 years younger than the oldest one. We already filmed in New York, with me just talking, explaining, talking about time, and by doing that I had this sense, like in a bad movie, of opening a door and suddenly standing in the middle of a field, surrounded by space. So I need to decide whether to go back through the door or to start to construct a new way of playing with time.



The anyspace
whatever...



Top: *theanyspacewhatever* (2004), black vinyl wall text, dimensions variable. **Left:** *Singular Roundrail (Red)* (2012), powder coated aluminium, 5 x 200 x 5 cm. **Right:** *Restricted Discussion* (2013), 2 x wall elements: powder-coated aluminium, plexiglass, each 50 x 20 x 8.5 cm. **All images:** Installation view, Taro Nasu, Tokyo, 2013. Courtesy Liam Gillick and Taro Nasu, Tokyo.

ART iT: You mentioned your certainties are starting disappear. What are these certainties?

LG: There has been an increasing pressure in the last few years that has come with the emergence of a new art history, a history of contemporary art. This history often looks at what was missed and tries to bring it back, to replay or reanimate something that happened in the past. There's a lot of reanimation and recuperation going on, which means saving something or reenacting it, and I'm thinking about this a lot.

One response is that I'm starting to make a film about another artist, Richard Hamilton, who died in 2011. Instead of thinking about ideas, as it were, I want to look closely at the ideas of another artist. Hamilton had a lot of good ideas. He did a lot of work around Duchamp. In the 1950s he played a lot with time and he played with projection and the idea of the exhibition as a form. He also liked to collaborate with other people, but then I think at a certain point he felt that he had to look more carefully at the artists he admired or who had influenced him, and verify what they meant for him. He went through a long process of reconstructing work by Duchamp and also transliterating Duchamp's notes into a form that could be clearly understood. So I decided to make a film about him as another way to find an escape route. I think he's an interesting character, but of course he's quite central at the same time. He's not on the edge. He's not forgotten. Certainly in Britain a lot of people think they like him, or think he's good, even though they don't know anything about him.

ART iT: Is the film going to be a condensed way of doing what Hamilton did with Duchamp?

LG: I don't know, to be honest. I have all this archival material, but I don't know how to start. I like the idea of making a film without permission, although obviously I can't upset him. It is a bit like repeating the past. Like if something strange happens or there's some kind of crisis, you recreate the situation or conditions that caused the crisis. I want to just look at this person and see what kind of film I can make. I don't know what it will produce, but something will happen.

I'm in that situation where, if you can imagine someone who's working and focused and writing or producing work on the computer, and then there's a knock on the door and they suddenly look around – I'm that person. I'm looking around, because I've suddenly realized that I need to check something. Some of it's to do with being physical, some of it's to do with watching and photographing, and some of it's to do with new subjects, using a human being as a subject, or a city. We'll see.