



## The Aesthetics of the End of Time

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I can consider the past, the present and the future with ease. In fact, at times, it is true that none of these terms hold any meaning for me any longer.<sup>1</sup>

Departing from controversies about the end of History<sup>2</sup> since the late 1970s, and its relation to the so-called “end of utopia,” I will try to focus on the aesthetics (that is to say a mixture of affects and possible arguments) of the question of the end of questions regarding the goal of History. Liam Gillick’s work will be our object even if I will draw some other conclusions.

In 1998 Jocelyn Benoist and Fabio Merlini edited a book called *Après la fin de l’histoire—temps, monde, historicité* [*After the End of History: Time, the World and Historicity*]. In their introduction, they write: “In this sense, the particularly serious and important fact expressed through the clichéd formula of the ‘end of history’ might be the following: at some point, we have ceased to believe in history.”<sup>3</sup> In this sense, the postmodern ground for the question of the end of history is no longer laid as a final endpoint, but more as an exhausted narrative or a vanishing

belief. Here it seems crucial to note a related notion of belief put forward by Jeremy Millar four years later in reference to the artist Liam Gillick: “We are able to walk on air, but only as long as our illusion supports us.”<sup>4</sup> Already in *Infancy and History*, Giorgio Agamben conjured the very same notion, recontextualizing it to bring to the fore a waning of experience in contemporary society: “those cartoon characters of our childhood who can walk on thin air as long as they don’t notice it; once they realize, once they experience this, they are bound to fall.”<sup>5</sup> Wile E. Coyote particularly comes to mind here: he is a most purposeful character but, in his case, the end—to catch the Road Runner—is forever postponed. If what is at issue with Agamben is the postmodern destruction of experience in the context of a technologically administered world, it is this technological world that Liam Gillick metaphorically approaches in his work by defining some of its key figures.

Gillick’s project takes shape through the development of a work that is aesthetically based—in its discourse as well as in its material manifestations—on the question of post-utopian phenomenology. The end of time is a central motif in his work, one that arises from a tension between the built world (which I shall formulate as the technical world) and the phenomenology of human experience (a phenomenology of lived experiences within the context of an ideological crisis). If, just like the cartoon

1 Liam Gillick, *Erasmus is Late*, (London: Book Works, 1995) 30.

2 In this essay, “history” with a small “h” will refer to a kind of history which is not oriented by a telos and can therefore be multiple; while “History” with a capital “H” is oriented by a telos, and leads for instance to Judgment Day in Christian eschatology, a strong Western conceptual model that still underlies everyday consciousness.

3 Jocelyn Benoist and Fabio Merlini, “Penser l’Histoire après l’Histoire,” in *Après la fin de l’histoire—temps, monde, historicité* (Paris: Vrin, 1998), 9.

4 Jeremy Millar, “We are able to walk on air, but only as long as our illusion supports us”, *The Wood Way* (London: Whitechapel Art Gallery, 2002), 10. Exh. cat.

5 Giorgio Agamben, *Infancy and History*, trans. Liz Heron (London: Verso, 1993), 16.

6 Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 14.

7 Catherine Malabou, *Le change Heidegger—Du fantastique en philosophie*, (Paris: Léo Scheer, 2004), 207.

characters of our childhood, we can ordinarily walk “on ideological air” as long as we do not notice it, what happens when we become aware of the ravine lying under our feet? What is the nature of the fall? And what are its consequences?

### 1. *Gestell* and its relationship to the concept of the end

Upon the elusive ground laid by Jeremy Millar lies the philosophical question that frames Liam Gillick’s work—that of the becoming-machine of human interrelationships. In his texts as well as in the titles of his works, a lexicon evolves that heightens the tension around technicality—the entire set of concepts generated by reflection upon the Heideggerian notion of *Gestell* (as the framework or more precisely *enframing* function of modern technology) which are close to those developed by Jean-François Lyotard in his theory of the postmodern. Indeed terms such as “semiotics of the built world,” “delay screen” and “discussion island platform” project the very same kind of pathos and efficacy (the same imaginary) as those deployed by this foremost theorist of postmodernism.

In the introductory book he dedicated to this historical category, Lyotard poses the problem as follows:

As I have already said, economic “redeployment” in the current phase of capitalism, aided by a shift in techniques and technology, goes hand in hand with a change in the function of the State: the image of society this syndrome suggests necessitates a serious revision of the alternate approaches considered.<sup>6</sup>

This assertion shares a common vocabulary with Liam Gillick and its axiology can be found in postmodern definitions of *Gestell*. In a book inscribed in the tradition of Jacques Derrida’s deconstruction, *Le Change Heidegger*, Catherine Malabou tells us that *Gestell* is a “Janus head between two changes.”<sup>7</sup> She characterizes it as a transitional concept in which the “forgetting of Being” occurs, projecting us into a whole new “epochality”

of Being: “It is the essence of technology that is ‘ambiguous [zweideutig]’. Technology is indeed the intermediate or mediator between two changes.”<sup>8</sup> Through *Gestell*, one history of Being comes to an end and turns into another—the forgetting of the essence of Being takes place in the very essence of Being. As Malabou puts it, “it is not technology itself, Heidegger repeats, that is “dangerous,” but the forgetting of Being that realizes itself through it.”<sup>9</sup> What I wish to underscore is that through *Gestell* the epoch of the question of Being comes to an end, in the sense that it is resolved into something else. In the realm of *Gestell* man no longer questions the essence of Being; and, in an increasingly technological world, this un-grounds his specific status as the entity that was once the basis of the question of Being. With this reorganization of subjectivity, History as a specific social relation in time with a beginning, middle and end (a teleology) loses its primacy. One “end” of History thus happens as an event through the accomplishment of a forgetting of Being; and this also opens up the possibility of overcoming Historical time as such.

We must then ask what this overcoming involves in the History of Being. In Gianni Vattimo’s reading of Heidegger, this moment is the *Ereignis*, the “event of Being,” which he elaborates as that “where any appropriation—any gift of something as something—only actualizes itself as transappropriation in a dizzying circle where man and Being lose all metaphysical character.”<sup>10</sup> Instead of appropriation then, there is an infinite exchange of signs. Vattimo thus derives a consequence that has to do

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid., 209.

10 Gianni Vattimo, *La fine della modernità* (Milan: Garzanti, 1985).

11 Ibid.

12 This non-knowledge is a motor force in the sense that it generates the asking of the question, primarily the question of the existence of language itself. Self-satisfied knowledge only acts as a motor force with respect to other objects of knowledge—it is full in itself.

13 Lyotard, 4 (modified translation).

14 Ibid., xxv.

15 Stéphane Legrand, *Le Monde*, (August 5, 2008): 15.

16 Ibid.

with the end of the moment when man was the support of the question: “Ultimately the transappropriation through which the *Ereignis* of Being actualizes itself is the dissolution of Being into exchange-value.”<sup>11</sup> Initially exchange-value turns into a specific kind of language, but as this language is not supported by a metaphysics of some kind it loses the positive transcendence attached to motor non-knowledge.<sup>12</sup> Later on it becomes a machinic language [*langage de machine*], as Lyotard puts it,<sup>13</sup> a language whose essence is the mere exchange of information and which is quite possibly related to a value (capital) in the actual utopia (that is, the heterotopia) of a world lifted up [*aufgehoben*] by technology. Therefore, *Gestell*-related theories embrace the end of one world and renew the coordinates of the following one, where capitalism regulates the exchange of information between linguistic machines. “Where, after the metanarratives, can legitimacy reside?” asks Lyotard. “The operativity criterion is technological.”<sup>14</sup>

With his notions of the scenario and the dialectic of speculation and planning, Liam Gillick’s research tests the potential efficacy of postmodern narrativizations of a horizon, or a going-toward-the-future. In the background of all this is a question about the end of History, which also contains that of the end of utopia; a relation that requires clarification.

## 2. The End of History and the End of Utopia

In its August 5, 2008 issue, the French newspaper *Le Monde* presented Herbert Marcuse as “the intellectual mentor of angry students [of May ’68],”<sup>15</sup> referring to his 1964 publication *One-Dimensional Man*, a book wherein he “offered an analysis of contemporary (capitalist and communist) societies based on a critique of the technological rationalization of the world.”<sup>16</sup> In the French context, Marcuse proves to be a likely political embodiment of our previous discussion of modern technology. This is how Stéphane Legrand summarizes the philosopher’s claims: “This rationalization [of the world] is presented as the main instrument of the domination of man by man, embodied in the mechanisms of social control which are incorporated by the

individuals themselves and become their very desire and will, integrating and recuperating in advance any kind of critique or opposition.”<sup>17</sup> And in an elaboration of the transformation of critical options, Marcuse opens his “The End of Utopia,” published in 1968, with an equation:

Today any form of the concrete world, of human life, any transformation of the technical and natural environment is a possibility, and the locus of this possibility is historical. Today we have the capacity to turn the world into hell, and we are well on the way to doing so. We also have the capacity to turn it into the opposite of hell. This would mean the end of utopia, that is, the refutation of those ideas and theories that use the concept of utopia to denounce certain socio-historical possibilities. It can also be understood as the “end of history” in the very precise sense that the new possibilities for a human society and its environment can no longer be thought of as continuations of the old, nor even as existing in the same historical continuum with them. Rather, they presuppose a break with the historical continuum; they presuppose the qualitative difference between a free society and societies that are still unfree, which, according to Marx, makes all previous history only the prehistory of mankind.<sup>18</sup>

I would like to use this as a framework to discuss one of Liam Gillick’s recent works, *Construcción de Uno – Construction of One*, an evolving “book” (that is still being written and has begun to morph into other texts) related to various exhibitions of the artist’s works, including the one held at the Palais de Tokyo in 2005, entitled *A Short Essay on the Possibility of an Economy of*

17 Ibid.

18 Herbert Marcuse, “The End of Utopia,” trans. Jeremy Schapiro and Shierry M. Weber. Available at [www.marcuse.org](http://www.marcuse.org). Originally published in Herbert Marcuse, *Five Lectures* (Berlin: Beacon, 1970).

Still from Pier Paolo Pasolini’s *Teorema*, 1968  
Subtitle translation: “Are you not robbed of the hope for a future revolution?”  
Photo: Benoit Maire



*Equivalence*. The text posits a scenario where factory workers attempt to reorganize themselves after their factory has stopped producing cars in the old way, leaving them de-alienated from the authority of managers. A situation that is similar to the cinematic preface of Pasolini's *Teorema*<sup>19</sup> develops here; this is how Liam Gillick describes it: "As time goes by, they entirely reconfigure their workplace environment. They write on the walls and draw diagrams on the floor that reveal their thought-processes, false starts and wrong developments. New windows are cut which open up fresh perspectives."<sup>20</sup> To accompany this narrative, the exhibition figures visual elements related to the workers' program: a structure called *A diagram of the factory once the former workers had cut extra windows in the walls* (2004/2005) offers an abstract visualization of a fact reported in the narrative; another work, *The view constructed by the factory after it stopped producing cars* (2004/2005), is composed of colorful, powder-coated steel slabs cut into the (simplified, computer-generated) shapes of mountains, propped up and distributed

- 19 Here Pasolini contextualizes the main subject of his story—the breakdown of a bourgeois family following the arrival of an incarnation of Eros—with a short passage in which the *pater familias* bequeaths his factory to his employees. A journalist then goes on to ask: Are you not robbed of the hope for a future revolution?
- 20 Liam Gillick, note on his exhibition at the Palais de Tokyo, 2005.
- 21 This is a structure within the same series of works; it was first shown as part of the 2005 exhibition *Fabriken im schnee... [Factories in the Snow]* at Galerie Meyer Kainer in Vienna.
- 22 Amaurote is the capital town of Thomas More's island of Utopia. Icara is the capital town of Icaria, a country imagined by Etienne Cabet. In 1840 he published a scientific-political treatise, *A Journey to Icaria*, in which he described the social and political organization of an imagined community based on state socialism.
- 23 Gilles Lapouge, "Le lieu glissant de l'improbable," *Le Magazine littéraire*, 139, (July-August 1978): 16.
- 24 "As any other state, though with unbounded violence, utopia has a privileged enemy, the individual and his or her freedom. The individual has to die for the absolute state to run smoothly—for the individual is scandalously unpredictable!" Ibid.
- 25 Liam Gillick previously approached counter-utopia without naming it in *Literally No Place—An Introduction*, through the issue of the forces of becoming in a self-managed community and relying on B.F. Skinner's *Walden 2*. He also observes the ambivalent issue of control and freedom in actual utopia when noting that: "They have a need to come and somehow project a place where they can be controlled and free simultaneously." The text appears in *Parkett* 61 (2001): 68.

evenly for a rudimentary landscape effect; a poster made by graphic design studio M/M recycles 1960s political imagery; and another element built with metallic parts drawn from a former car factory, entitled *The INTENT constructed by the factory once it has stopped producing cars* (2005)<sup>21</sup> perfects Liam Gillick's artistic object. If Liam Gillick's artistic complex—that is simultaneously a "scenographed" exhibition, a set of concrete objects and a written narrative—stages a kind of liberation that can be compared with the one that Herbert Marcuse puts into perspective, are we dealing with the creation of a utopia?

According to Gilles Lapouge, "no society in history, however well-planned, however boring, can rival Amaurote and Icara."<sup>22</sup> One has to go down the various strata of animal life to find societies fashioned on a utopian model: the beehive and the termitarium—those ferocious, neat and gloomy organizations, alien to any alterations, immune to the unpredictable, are the sole living utopias that ever worked."<sup>23</sup> It is important to note that both species alluded to here are builders; they construct their living place, thereby organizing an order related to a specific architecture. Liam Gillick is also interested in the built environment since building functions as an interface between man and nature. The great utopian texts are always accompanied by the imaginary formulation of a rationalized living space, notably Fourier's phalanstery or Thomas More's island. The utopia that presides over great changes in society is always set towards an end; therefore an ideology, a way of seeing the world that is projected as actual and that orientates a politics. A post-utopian epoch is thus an era of the post-totalizing-ideology that may allow for the emergence of the forms of micro-politics defined by Deleuze and Guattari; local utopias may spring up and guide micro-actions in the social sphere. In this sense the situation imagined by Liam Gillick would be one of counter-utopia (such as May '68 in France, for example). If, as Lapouge asserts, the concept of utopia amounts to depriving individuals of their freedom,<sup>24</sup> by contrast here the workers are free and able to reorganize themselves.<sup>25</sup> This kind of counter-utopia is not a longing for an ideal; rather, it is a free pragmatic action towards an

undetermined, unreachable point, an immanent rather than transcendent action; it emerges as the inaugural moment of a newly transformed social system that provides each individual with room to maneuver. The dynamics of counter-utopia is, however, sustained by a desire for utopia (such is its dialectics), that is, by the projection of an other place that literally has no place but nonetheless directs the action in a non-programmatic way.

### 3. The Differing/Deferring Mirror

Within the boundaries of our own society, Liam Gillick theoretically offers a parallel reflection, a mirror through which possibilities for non-actual but actualizable worlds can emerge. Whether or not this metaphor of the artist's work is retrograde, I would like to explore its implications. Foucault argues that the space of the mirror is a heterotopia, that is to say an "other place," a utopia whose essence has been actualized, a utopia, therefore, that has contradicted itself as it has taken place somewhere: "I believe that between utopias and these quite other sites, these heterotopias, there might be a sort of mixed, joint experience, which would be the mirror. The mirror is, after all, a utopia, since it is a placeless place."<sup>26</sup> Foucault then argues: "But it is also a heterotopia in so far as the mirror does exist in reality, where it exerts a sort of counteraction on the position that I occupy."<sup>27</sup> Since Gillick's work asserts itself as a narrative that parallels our time, as a possible, although imagined, scenario, it operates as a mirror and deploys itself as a heterotopia, understood as a utopia that finds an embodiment in reality. In this sense, it participates in the modern artistic process of a conflation of form and content.

In Liam Gillick's practice, we confront Derridean *differance* as such. In a posthumously published interview,<sup>28</sup> Derrida confesses that he first used the word deconstruction in

26 Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces" (1967), trans. Jay Miskowicz. Available at [www.foucault.info](http://www.foucault.info)

27 Ibid.

28 Jacques Derrida, "Qu'est-ce que la déconstruction?" interview with Roger-Pol Droit, *Cahier du Monde* (October 12, 2004)

Liam Gillick  
*McNamara*, 1994,  
Brionvega Algol TVC 11R showing 35 mm film transferred onto appropriate format,  
Florence Knoll table (optional), copies of various drafts of the film *McNamara*,  
additional copy of film script written for the owner  
Private collection  
Courtesy the artist and Esther Schipper, Berlin



an attempt to translate two words, one from Heidegger, who referred to “destruction” and the other from Freud, who talked about “distanciation.” *Differance* with an *a* rather than an *e* can be read as “diff-errance,” to underscore the *errance* [in French wandering, straying] of the sign and to deconstruct the primacy of the primordial presence asserted by classical metaphysics. Yet with primordial *differance*, the alleged presence of a being that would coincide with itself has to be conquered through a process that privileges the kind of hermeneutics Gianni Vattimo has applied to the issue of postmodernity. Thus logocentrism is excluded. Liam Gillick’s reflective mirror *differances* the given goal or telos. Here, *the question of the aim* orients a given social process, precisely when that process lacks such an orientation.

Since the place of utopia remains vacant—for post-utopian society presents itself as an epoch in which the end has not taken place even though the belief in the idea of the end itself is abandoned—Liam Gillick raises the question of the social orientation towards the future (and the correlative question of who will be the decision makers responsible for this orientation). In his own words: “When I started to work on the book *DISCUSSION ISLAND/BIG CONFERENCE CENTRE*, I wanted to look at the implications that these earlier sociopolitical moments had generated for our time and move into a discussion around the question “who controls the near future in a post-utopian situation?”<sup>29</sup> Here, the question of the end of History is related with its political becoming. Such is the framework in which Liam Gillick tries to understand how the future can be constructed (via planning or speculative scenarios) once a certain kind of history has collapsed. This future builds and fashions itself through perceptual screens that give human relationships a

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- 29 Liam Gillick, “Speculation and Planning”, interview with Anthony Spira in *The Wood Way* (London: Whitechapel Art Gallery, 2002), 14. Exh. cat.  
 30 Bernard Stiegler, *La technique et le temps*. Vol 3: *Le temps du cinéma et la question du mal-être* (Paris, éditions Galilée, 2001), 33.  
 31 Philippe Parreno, “Facteur Temps,” in *Speech Bubbles* (Dijon: Les Presses du réel, 2001), 19. Gillick and Parreno have been in dialogue since the inception of their careers.  
 32 Gillick, “Speculation and Planning,” 14.

differentiated temporality; in other words, each kind of screen generates a specific way of relating to time.

#### 4. The Temporalities of the Screen

In 2001 Bernard Stiegler published the third volume of his *La Technique et le temps—le temps du cinéma et la question du mal-être* [Technology and Time: The Time of Cinema and the Question of Malaise]. On page 33 we come across the following: “Just like a melody, a film is essentially a flow: it constitutes its unity as running. As a flow, this temporal object coincides with the flow of the consciousness of which it is the object—the viewer’s consciousness.”<sup>30</sup> In an art exhibition the artist usually fills up the visual space and leaves the wandering viewer as much time as she needs to read each and every exhibited work. This kind of object is not subjected to the rule of flowing time, with, say, a beginning and an ending. In the 1990s, however, the temporal dimension of the work came to be discussed in its own right. As Philippe Parreno puts it, “Curiously, if art has indeed dealt with space, it has never dealt with time. It would seem that only the institutions have the ability to decide how long a work is to be visible [...] Cinema teaches us to be patient; we have to wait for the words *THE END* to appear. In art the words *THE END* never appear.”<sup>31</sup> In another context, Gillick talks about how his work relates to the end: “The work is not a sequence of endpoints. I am trying to put forward fluctuating moments of connection.” “The viewer,” he goes on to say, “has to deal with the implications and potential of it.”<sup>32</sup> It could be said that since the 1990s the exhibition has been increasingly recognized in relation to the notion of the variable temporality of the screen. If the cinematic screen has a linear chronology, television is constituted of multiple screens and the resulting constellations of mutually disruptive narratives establish a multiple sense of time.

Gillick is clearly aware of what is at stake in (perceptions of) the passing of time and sets in place a strategy that aims to reflect it in two ways: first, in the dynamic framework of his general approach (its inner dialectics), where the meaning of an object can be deferred/differed in a never-ending way;

second, in the explicit subject matter of his research which poses questions of who controls what in the future. Gillick's work thus contains the notion of waiting, of waiting for the full sign whose presence is only secured through a narrative or through visual details, even if the full sign arguably never arrives. As Gillick puts it in an interview with Eric Troncy, "these pieces [*Discussion Island Resignation Platform* and *Discussion Island Development Screen*] function deceptively. The viewer may think there is an immediate recognition because the materials (aluminum and Plexiglas) refer to certain concerns in the recent history of art and to a certain look, but clearly it is also about a platform and a screen. They do not draw you towards fundamental material values. They create a transient feeling."<sup>33</sup> In Gillick's work, the screen operates in a twofold manner: on the one hand it informs the aesthetics of his minimal pieces in an original fashion; and on the other, it raises the issue of the virtual.<sup>34</sup> To my mind, the "projection/scenario" and the construction of screens go hand in hand.

The phenomenological nature of the experience of screens is such that we cannot define it yet, but compared with standard ontological categories, the category of the virtual becomes increasingly crucial. As we saw with Agamben in the introduction, our increasingly technological world is accompa-

33 Liam Gillick, "Les gens étaient-ils aussi bêtes avant la télé?," Interview with Eric Troncy, *Documents sur l'art*, Fall/Winter 1997: 118.

34 The virtual is a classic notion in the history of art, where it concerns the multifarious forms of the screen: in the Renaissance, through the discovery of the space of representation through the window/screen; in modernity, through the discovery of surface as the essence of the medium through the monochrome; in postmodernity, through the rise of networks of windows whose model is the computer screen. Liam Gillick's work may be inscribed as the perpetuation of this history, questioning for example the virtuality of a building in his recent video, *Everything Good Goes* (2008) where he draws a 3D computer model of the Salumi Factory from Jean-Luc Godard and Pierre Gorin's 1972 film, *Tout va bien*.

35 Liam Gillick (to Eric Troncy), "Les gens étaient-ils aussi bêtes avant la télé?," 120.

36 From my own notes on Slavoj Žižek's unpublished lecture, *La mort de Lacan*, Centre Pompidou, Paris, May 2007.

37 This is also the title of a book by Kostas Axelos, *Marx penseur de la technique* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1961).

nied by a certain vanishing of direct experience. Let us consider Liam Gillick's answer to Eric Troncy, when Troncy said, "In a previous discussion you mentioned capitalism as the source of your interest in these relations between present, past and future":

The fundamental changes that lead to our Western sense of capitalism relate to the development of projections and scenarios. What happens when one realizes that each day is not the same as the previous one? Before that, when most people believed in God or in a given system of social structures, each day was more or less the same as the following day. As soon as this notion was called into question, the possibility of sophisticated economic projections arose [...] Today's dominant capitalism still uses this notion of projection on a daily basis as a substitute for all-too-inaccessible utopias.<sup>35</sup>

The issue of projection is inherent in the screen; and capitalism—which, according to Žižek, is a machine able to function with any narrative<sup>36</sup>—unfolds as a technological universe where virtual space substitutes itself for real space. Screens mediate this substitution. The formula, heard at the beginning of Jean-Luc Godard's *Le Mépris* that that "cinema substitutes reality with a world that conforms to our desire" may henceforth be extended to all kinds of screens. Yet, as Bernard Stiegler claims, this desire must itself be understood as conditioned by a capitalism that commodifies individual behaviors, through temporal objects continuously flowing on screens, and deprives us of our singular processes of individuation. For Stiegler this new situation can be traced back to a discussion on the topic of Marx as a thinker of technology.<sup>37</sup> And he is more specific on this topic in a footnote: "Marx was the very first author who considered technology philosophically and gave the first massive blow to metaphysics." He adds further on: "[Raymond] Aron does not seem to realize that this theory of capital is also a theory of



Liam Gillick  
*The State Itself Becomes a Super Whatnot*  
Exhibition view Casey Kaplan, New York, 2008  
Courtesy of the artist and Casey Kaplan, New York



Liam Gillick  
*Delay Screen*, 1999  
Plexiglas and anodized aluminium  
360 cm × 240 cm × 30 cm  
courtesy Private Collection, New York and Casey Kaplan Gallery.



technology, probably because he underestimates the strange convergence of Heidegger and Marx on capital, something on which [Kostas] Axelos indeed insisted. In Heidegger capital means calculation as the inner-worldly temporality that strives to determine the undetermined.”<sup>38</sup> Within the context of what we have shown to be a post-Historical (and therefore endless) period, we can see the emergence of a whole range of short narratives without transcendent teleologies. These short narratives are so many established scenarios offered to the postmodern-consumer-individual to enable her to live a programmed life with a sense of freedom. Control of the future is therefore conditioned by the control of behaviors. Marketing scenarios increasingly seek to produce out of these short teleologies false processes of “individuation,” a concept that Stiegler borrows from Simondon. Such narratives are short, discrete, perfectly oriented toward multiple ends and have a henceforth purely technological meaning. In my opinion, within this confusion over singularity, we are not far from Liam Gillick’s use of B.F. Skinner’s revisionary *Walden 2*, a hypothesis of a society totally controlled by behaviorism.<sup>39</sup> When Gillick talks about the screen and the scenario he is speaking at a governmental level—the level of management—which tries to predict and plan. Yet the grounds for the question “So were people this dumb before television?” (posed to him by Eric Troncy<sup>40</sup>) is that no teleology—apart from a short kind of teleology—can emerge out of the multiple temporalities inherent in the allegory of the television screen. Are these “short” teleolo-

38 Stiegler, 135–136.

39 Liam Gillick, “Literally No Place—An Introduction,” op. cit. Relying on B.F. Skinner’s *Walden 2* (published in 1948), Liam Gillick investigates the communal political space. Skinner’s book echoes Henry David Thoreau’s *Walden*; but whereas the latter told of his solitary life in the woods over a period of two years, two months and two days, Skinner’s theory interrogates political praxis in the polis through the control of behaviors, turning upside down Thoreau’s romantic mysticism of a solitary man within nature.

40 Troncy and Gillick, 118.

41 Gillick, *Erasmus is Late*, page

42 Arthur C. Danto, *After the End of Art: Contemporary Art and the Pale of History* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1997), 202.

43 Ibid., 203.

gies de-ideologized by the same token? Liam Gillick’s concept of scenario seems to have the status of a teleology without ideology.

##### 5. What does it mean to be able to live in an open temporality?

At the heart of Gillick’s *Erasmus is Late* is the fantasy of inhabiting a history made of plateaus of various temporalities and of being able to go through them at will. In this narrative, Erasmus Darwin (brother of Charles) wanders the streets of London, between the early nineteenth century and 1997, on his way to a dinner that brings together a number of protagonists who share the trait of directly impacting the writing of history (without being on the covers of history books). These protagonists act upon history simply by thinking it, or as Gillick puts it: “I know that wanting to predict the future changes the future.”<sup>41</sup> During the entire course of the story Erasmus is late, which means that he is constantly deferring his presence at the dinner. He remains in a parallel space: taking part in the discussions and debates by thinking about them and inhabiting sites in London while mentally visiting their historical moments as sites for the development of free thought.

In his reflection on the end of the history of art, Arthur C. Danto notes a similar effect in the realm of art-historical construction. As he puts it in *After the End of Art Contemporary Art and the Pale of History*: “We are really very far from yesterday’s tomorrow. Yet there is a great difference between how the future is inaccessible for us and how the past, which we can know, eludes our grasp. This asymmetry defines the structure of historical being.”<sup>42</sup> Danto then introduces the concept of “form of life,” a notion he borrows from Wittgenstein’s philosophy: “A form of life is something lived and not merely known about.”<sup>43</sup> For Danto there cannot be a full revisiting of history insofar as historical reflection can never turn into an efficient form of life. By including the inner voice of Erasmus—brother of the theorist of the historical continuity of the species—Gillick’s narrative tests possible experiences as forms of life. The discursive aspect of Erasmus’s differing/deferring trajectory across the city may

be interpreted as a metaphor of the sign never reaching completion, but it also deploys another quality inherent in the sign, namely, its transhistorical presence. The question of Being thus acquires a multiple temporality with multiple strata and various plateaus. This trajectory involves a resistance to *Gestell* (which may be defined as the development of an autonomous form of technology which deprives human beings of the possibility to sustain the question of Being in its classical metaphysical sense) in so far as it introduces the question of the diachronic character of presence. Differing/diferring presence, which is insatiable, here produces waiting on a level that is disconnected from the unfolding horizontality of classical time. The brother of the thinker of continuity discovers diachronic *differance*. Through Erasmus's situationist wandering around London, based as it is on random occasions, encounters and motives for being late, a discursive experience is set in place: a time for life and thought which, as a multiplicity, punctuates what is usually conceived of as the "bandwidth" of time. In this way, time can now be thought of as a knot in which past, present and future merge, not by the mere fact of temporal retroactions, but by the emergence of a transhistorical community.

#### 6. Diachronic Conviviality

In his most celebrated book, *Tools of Conviviality* published in 1973, Ivan Illich defined a concept of conviviality that he developed in the context of a debate on ethics related to the rise of industrial society: "For several years [...] we have conducted critical research on the monopoly of the industrial mode of production and have tried to define conceptually alternative modes that would fit a postindustrial age."<sup>44</sup> Within this very wide framework of the history of technology, Illich pragmatically focuses on the problem of the tool: Is not the tool, which is assigned to a function defined by man for a use towards an end, being perverted in industrial society? In other words, the tool

44 Ivan Illich, *Tools for Conviviality*, available online at [http://clevercycles.com/tools\\_for\\_conviviality/](http://clevercycles.com/tools_for_conviviality/).

*Stacked Revision Structure*, 2005  
courtesy Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo



may be disconnected from its end and in this sense, man no longer has control over tools but tools gain control over man. Consider how Illich formulates this historical transition and how this, in turn, inflects the concept of conviviality: “Such a society, in which modern technologies serve politically interrelated individuals rather than managers, I will call convivial.”<sup>45</sup> And further: “For a hundred years we have tried to make machines work for men and to school men for life in their service [...] The hypothesis on which the experiment was built must be discarded. The hypothesis was that machines can replace slaves. The evidence shows that, used for this purpose, machines enslave men.”

Thus the issue of conviviality in Illich’s work seems to have nothing to do with a friendly dinner or the public agora. Rather man is seen in the company of technology (*Gestell*) which ultimately deprives humanity of the question of Being. *Erasmus is Late* offers a reflection on the direction that can be given to history when *Gestell* emerges and leaves aside classical metaphysics.<sup>47</sup> According to Illich, each society has its own deep structure of decision making, and “unless people agree on a process that can be continuously, convivially, and effectively used to control society’s tools, the inversion of the present institutional structure cannot be either enacted or, what is more important, precariously maintained.”<sup>48</sup> What is at stake in Ivan Illich’s writings, and what can be found in Liam Gillick’s book, is man’s confrontation with the tools he creates—capital emerges on the horizon as the central term of this research. To put it roughly, man is its slave. And as Gillick opens a discussion on possible temporalities through the anachronological convergence of

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45 Ibid.

46 Ibid.

47 Or, according to Heidegger, man, by his sheer presence secured by the support of Being, and thereby the whole metaphysical edifice.

48 Illich.

49 Here I wish to express with my own terms, not excluding a hint of lyrical emotion, that a return to nature is the very dialectical opposite of the object worked on by Liam Gillick, thereby clarifying by an invisible opposition how his dialectic system can work.

the guests in *Erasmus is Late*, his utmost wish seems to be for a liberation of time itself. In an increasingly technological world, the artist narrates a reflection on the fantasized and idealized link between people pertaining to different times and different worlds.

Gillick and Illich both hold out the possibility of an experience lived on a first-degree ontological plateau, for the element that always remains unspoken in Gillick’s work, but which holds his aesthetics together is indeed Nature: the stream, the trout and Henry David Thoreau’s beard.<sup>49</sup> If, as Catherine Malabou puts it, *Gestell* is a “Janus head between two changes,” the first change might coincide with the forgetting of the question of Being, thereby auguring the end of a given world, of metaphysics and therefore of historicity as such. Yet reading Gillick’s work through Illich forces us to think the second stage of *Gestell*, which is grounded in a convivial approach to technology: human beings no longer are the things of technology; they now have a sympathetic relationship to it.

It seems to me that the concept of the screen is key to the mediation of our relationship to reality. Insofar as it generates virtuality, the screen opens onto a whole multiplicity of ontological plateaus. In his work, Liam Gillick never tries to fill a hollow object (a material screen) with a set of conceptual propositions, since the relationship between texts on the one hand and objects on the other is always one of *differance*. By constructing concrete screens, Gillick rather disrupts the concept of mediation that is inherent in them. This is, to be sure, a paradoxical gesture; yet as Hölderlin put it, on a spiritual level one has to become poor to become rich. In exactly the same way, to be destroyed as an idea, the screen must be realized materially. Such thingification deprives it of any function but a contemplative or aesthetic one: it becomes a finality without end and the object of a non-technological interest. What is then in sight is precisely that which is out of sight—destruction.

Translated from the French by Nicolas Vieillescazes