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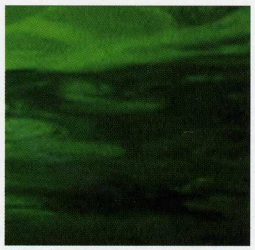

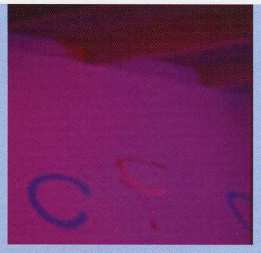

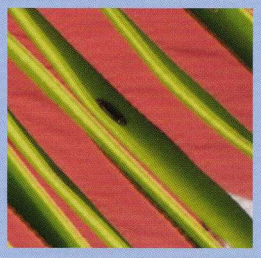

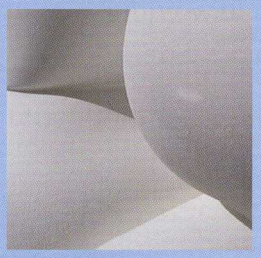

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Misty, sculptural, tactile, theatrical and experiential, atmospheric interiors represent a seismic shift for architecture. They celebrate a wholly Romantic sensibility, in which the emotional response overshadows the rational line and the sensory dominates over the intellect. It seems no coincidenc that the dictionary definition of the word 'atmosphere' expanded in the late 18th century – the Romantic era in England – from that pertaining solely to planetary gases to the 'sense of surrounding influence, mental or moral environment'.[1] Turner, probably the most renowned Romanti painter, made famous by his stormy seascapes – full of spray and light and air effects – also sough atmosphere in his interiors in the 1830s. When painting the interior of his patron's home, Petworth House in Sussex, he simply brought the mist inside.

Atmosphere brings with it an elusive, but compelling, resonance. So often restaurants, hotels or locations are recommended on the strength of their atmosphere alone. It is this attribute in contemporary life that is able to mark places out from the everyday or the banal – that gives them emotional meaning and human connection. Most often it is historic spaces that are described as atmospheric, evoking with their accumulated traces of human occupation and activity a bygone era whether a Belle Epoque Parisian brasserie or a medieval manor house.

So what can be in the air of newly completed interiors? Like Turner, guest-editor Julieanna Preston identifies the elusive quality of atmosphere with the metaphor or 'spatial figure' of mist (see p 7), opening the issue with the watery air of Peter Zumthor's Thermal Baths at Vals. She provides us with a multifaceted view of atmosphere in contemporary interiors rather than a single definition. The featured atmospheric spaces are aesthetically diverse, varying from the baroque theatricality of Philippe Starck's restaurant interiors to the restraint of Foster + Partners Kamakura House in Japan pictured on the cover. The emotional engagement that atmosphere evokes in its subject also makes it a potent field for artists and composers as well as architects, interior designers and textile designers, as epitomised by the work of La Monte Young Marian Zazeela in the *Dream House* installation in New York (pp 12–15) and the internal weather affects of Olafur Eliasson (pp 30–5). I is, however, the potential to create spaces that call on all our senses and seduce us with the desire to simply reach out and touch a lumpy wall or a voluminous ceiling that is exhilarating – made reality by the progress of CAD/CAM technologies. It beckons a new era in which the eye has lost some o its ground, and the joy of touch and feeling in a space has gained new value. AD

Helen Castle

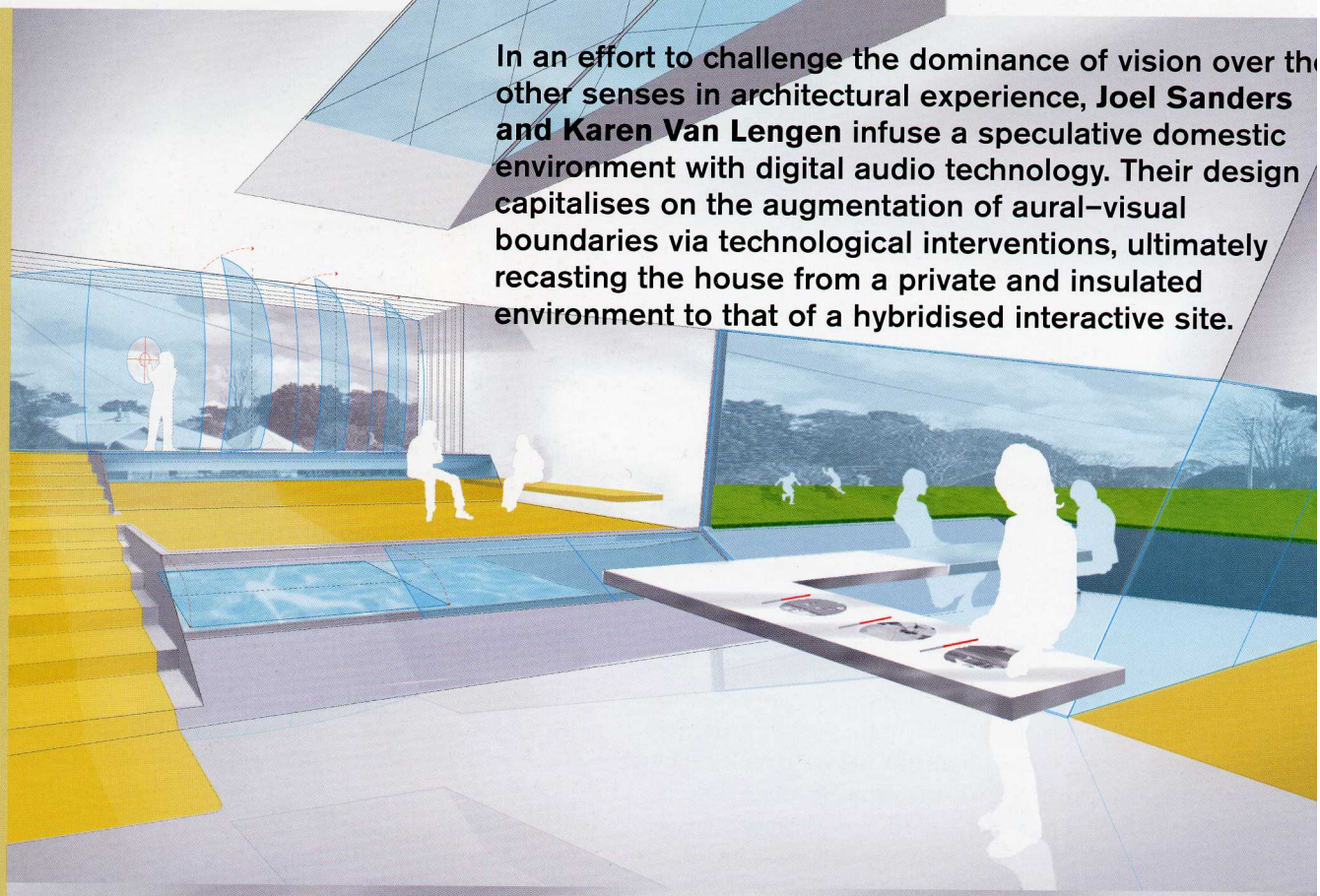
Note

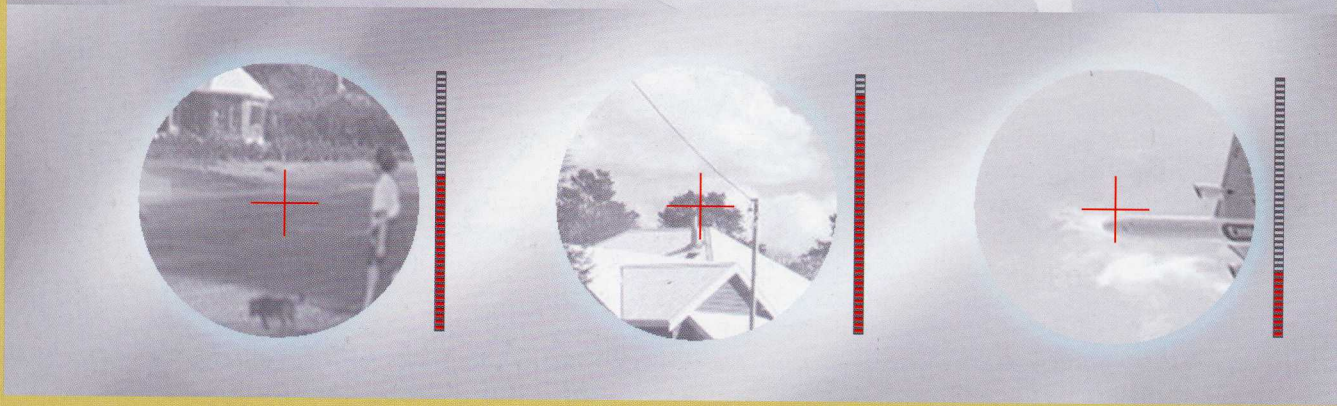
1. www.etymonline.com. Atmosphere: 1638, from Mod.L. *atmosphaera* (1638), from Gk. *atmos* 'vapor' + *spharia* 'sphere'. First used in Eng. in connection with the Moon, which, as it turns out, doesn't have one. Figurative sense of 'surrounding influence, mental or moral environment' is 1797.

Making Sense

The MIX House

In an effort to challenge the dominance of vision over the other senses in architectural experience, **Joel Sanders and Karen Van Lengen** infuse a speculative domestic environment with digital audio technology. Their design capitalises on the augmentation of aural–visual boundaries via technological interventions, ultimately recasting the house from a private and insulated environment to that of a hybridised interactive site.





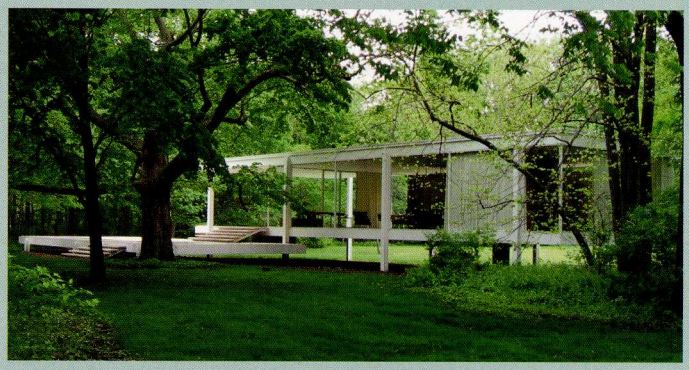
In our ocular-centric design culture, where does sound fit and how does it inform the development of domestic architecture? The MIX House, a collaborative project between Joel Sanders (JSA), Karen Van Lengen (KVLA) and Ben Rubin (Ear Studio), is a speculative house designed to provoke this enquiry. The project advocates an aural–ocular design strategy, a way of thinking that enlists new technologies to provoke a set of enhanced social and sensory experiences in domestic space.

Since antiquity, western thinkers from Aristotle to Hegel have organised the senses in a hierarchy that validates the age-old opposition between mind and matter, spirit and flesh. Sight, followed by hearing, occupies the top of the sensorial pyramid, with touch, taste and smell, considered to be the 'lower senses', at the bottom. Not unique to philosophy, these prevailing cultural assumptions about the senses have shaped the design of the built environment: western architects have primarily created buildings that appeal to the eye and neglect the body's other senses. But there are exceptional periods in western architectural history that abound with examples of buildings driven by acoustic qualities.

In oral societies, like those of pre-alphabetic Greece and Asia Minor, people prized sonic specificity: cultural exchange and the preservation of collective memory took place in aural space. Consider the perfect clarity of Greek amphitheatres, where a speaker, standing at a focal point created by the precise design of the surrounding walls, is distinctly heard by all the members of the audience. In a similar vein, during the Middle Ages, Romanesque abbeys such as Le Thoronet, and Gothic cathedrals such as Chartres, were valued as much for their acoustic qualities as they were for their visual principles: they functioned as sacred resonators for the recitation of the Christian word.[1] Some critics argue that popular literacy, made possible by the invention of the printed word, triggered a change in this sensate equilibrium, initiating a shift that favoured eye over ear. Although Renaissance architects like Leon Battista Alberti and Andrea Palladio devoted much thought to the intersection of sound, proportion and musical harmony, their work, aided by the newly invented tool of perspective, focused on visual principles, inaugurating the ocular-centric architectural tradition that we have inherited today.

The Modern movement, with its aim of developing a universal 'machine age' aesthetic, further separated a comprehensive relation between space and place. Modern architects such as Le Corbusier and Mies van de Rohe, exploiting the potential of new engineering techniques and materials (concrete, steel and manufactured glass), perfected the curtain wall, allowing them to realise the age-old dream of visual transparency. But while it dissolves the visual borders between inside and outside, the picture window is acoustically silent. Mies' iconic Farnsworth House encapsulates this Modernist tradition. Suspended above the ground plane in a sealed steel-and-glass enclosure, its inhabitants could enjoy uninterrupted panoramic views of the bucolic landscape framed by floor-to-ceiling window walls. These occupants become transfixed spectators, empowered to apprehend the landscape through disembodied vision.

Modern architecture's highly reflective surfaces and largely rectilinear arrangements hosted a range of acoustic problems, commonly known as 'acoustical glare'. In addition, the introduction of environmental control systems, designed for bodily comfort, imposed their own sonic identity that was overlaid on to such interiors. Historian Emily Thompson has argued that these systems, along with the hermetically sealed window walls, effectively cut off our connection to the aural specificity of place.[2]



Mies van der Rohe, Farnsworth House, Plano, Illinois, 1951
With its iconic glass curtain wall, Mies' house exemplifies the authority of visual transparency that dominated the Modern movement.

In the same way that new technologies revolutionised the sensory experience of buildings created by the pioneers of Modern architecture, today one of the most radical but least understood changes in our audiovisual sensory experience of space has been occasioned by the impact of digital technologies. Our sensory experiences are now more than ever affected by audiovisual stimuli transmitted by the proliferation of electronic devices installed in each and every room of our home. Unlike first-generation desktop computers that fixed stationary users in interior space, a new generation of mobile devices – BlackBerries, iPods and iPhones – now allows users to roam freely between inside and outside, public and private space. Some critics lament the introduction of these portable instruments that privatise space, confining individuals to sound bubbles of their own aesthetic choice. Travelling within such solo sound worlds provides people with a false sense of privacy and a deluded sense of control in allowing them to project their personal sonic choices on to the spaces they inhabit. These portable devices not only inhibit people from meaningful social interactions, but also render them indifferent to the sights, sounds and smells of their surroundings.[3]

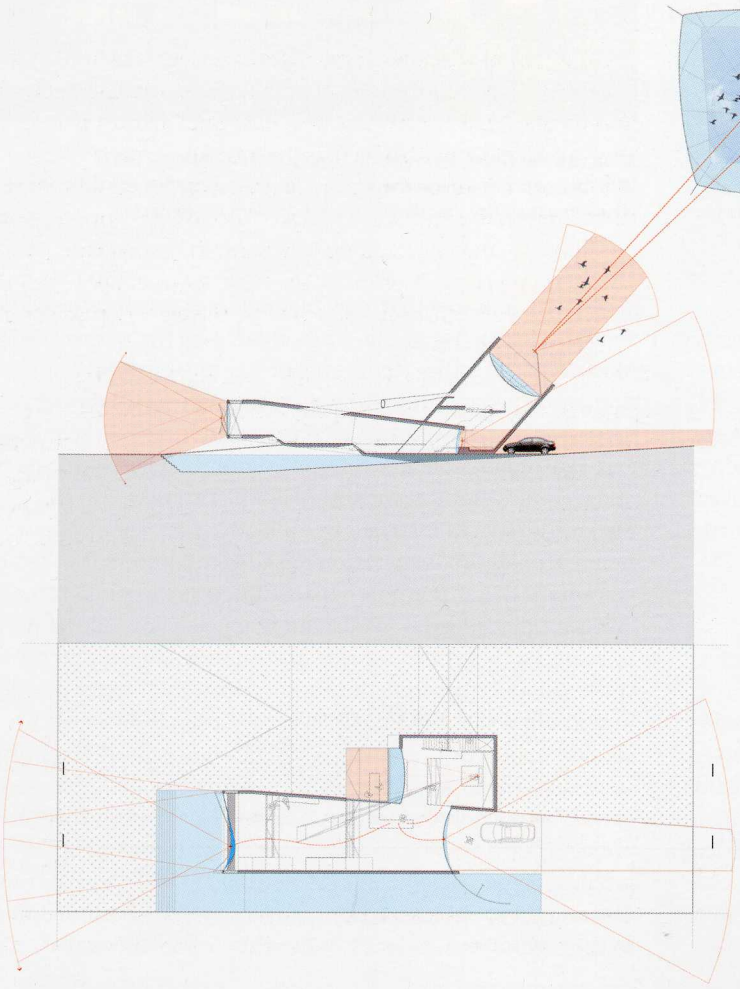
Joel Sanders, Karen Van Lengen and Ben Rubin, MIX House, suburban neighbourhood in Charlottesville, Virginia, 2006
The kitchen island serves as a new formalised command post, observation centre and nexus of this speculative environment.

Rather than simply repudiate or blindly embrace technological innovation, contemporary architects could evaluate the complex cultural, historical and spatial consequences of their use. Taking the critique of both Modernist acoustics and contemporary mobile technologies to heart, the MIX House project taps into the unrealised potential of new technologies to create opportunities for people to share meaningful audiovisual experiences in space.

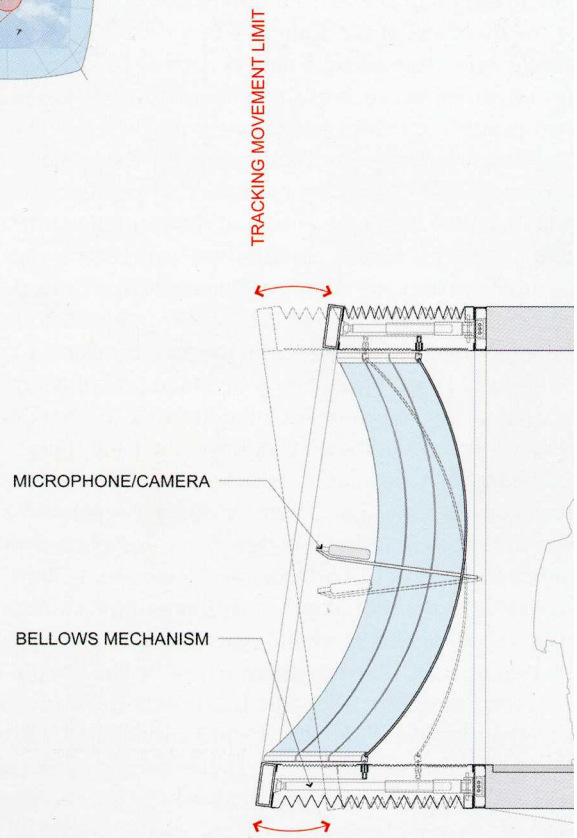
MIX House integrates a new kind of window wall within an acoustic design that achieves a condition that we take for granted in media: the integration of sound and image. By incorporating cutting-edge technologies with traditional acoustic principles, the project rethinks and extends the Modernist notion of visual transparency to include aural transparency as well.

Situated on a generic suburban plot, the dwelling is composed of two sound-gathering volumes outfitted with three audiovisual windows. The curved profile of each sonic windows operates in one of two ways: when oper louvred glass window wall admits the sound of the airl ambient environment, and when closed the window op as a transparent parabolic dish. The sonic dish include microphone and a small video camera located at its ce that electronically screens and targets domestic sound images and transmits them to an interior audio systen controlled from the kitchen island.

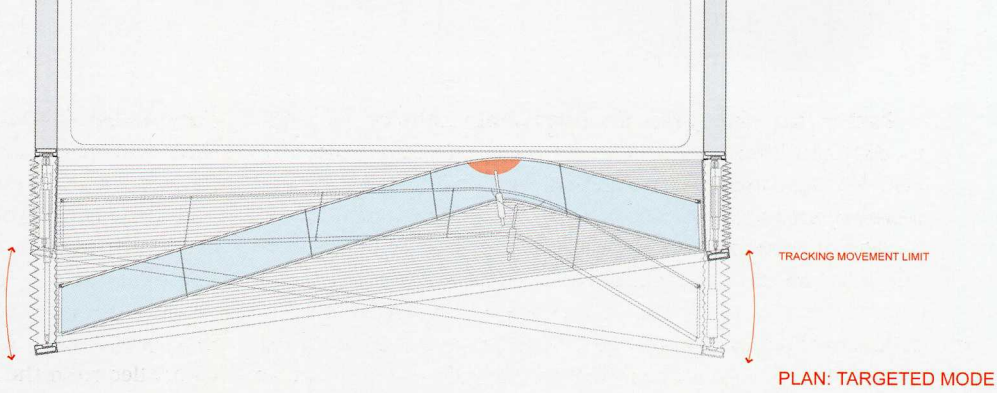
The living/dining wing, oriented horizontally on the frames the driveway at one end and the rear yard at th while the den/bedroom wing is oriented vertically to ca audiovisual views of the sky. In the living area, the son picture window aimed at the backyard swivels like a ca to extend its range of motion. At the entry, the front w wall doubles as a sliding glass door that allows occupa hear the sounds of the streetscape.



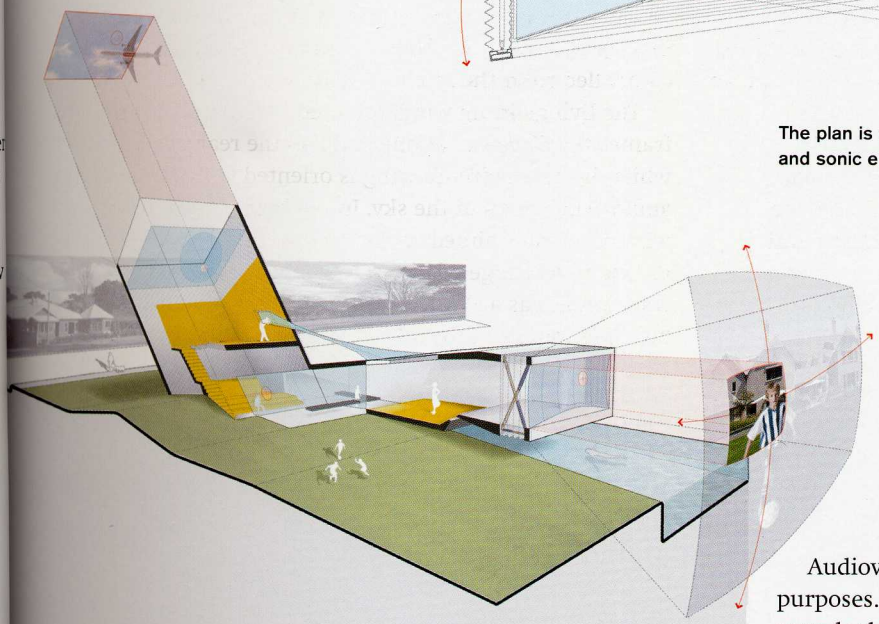
Located on a suburban plot, the MIX House is designed to capture the sights and sounds of the local environment and habitat.



The concave profile of the window wall inset with a microphone and video captures the sights and sounds of the exterior spaces and trar them to the Mix Counter in the kitchen.



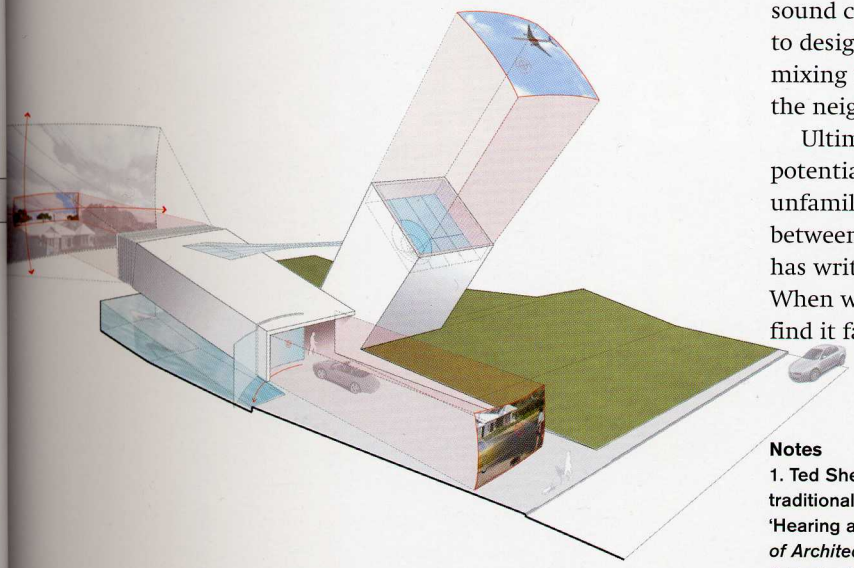
The plan is designed to spatially integrate the visual and sonic environments of its neighbourhood.



The section reinforces the planning strategies and rides above the outdoor pool to capture the water images and sounds through window openings located near its centre.

Audiovisual windows serve practical as well as aesthetic purposes. They allow home owners to filter specific domestic sounds they want to hear or to screen out invasive noises. Sonic windows can also be used to promote creative and collaborative interactions between the house's inhabitants. The communal heart of the house, the kitchen, doubles as a sound command centre, a place where occupants can gather to design impromptu original domestic soundscapes by mixing media-sponsored sounds with the ambient noises of the neighbourhood.

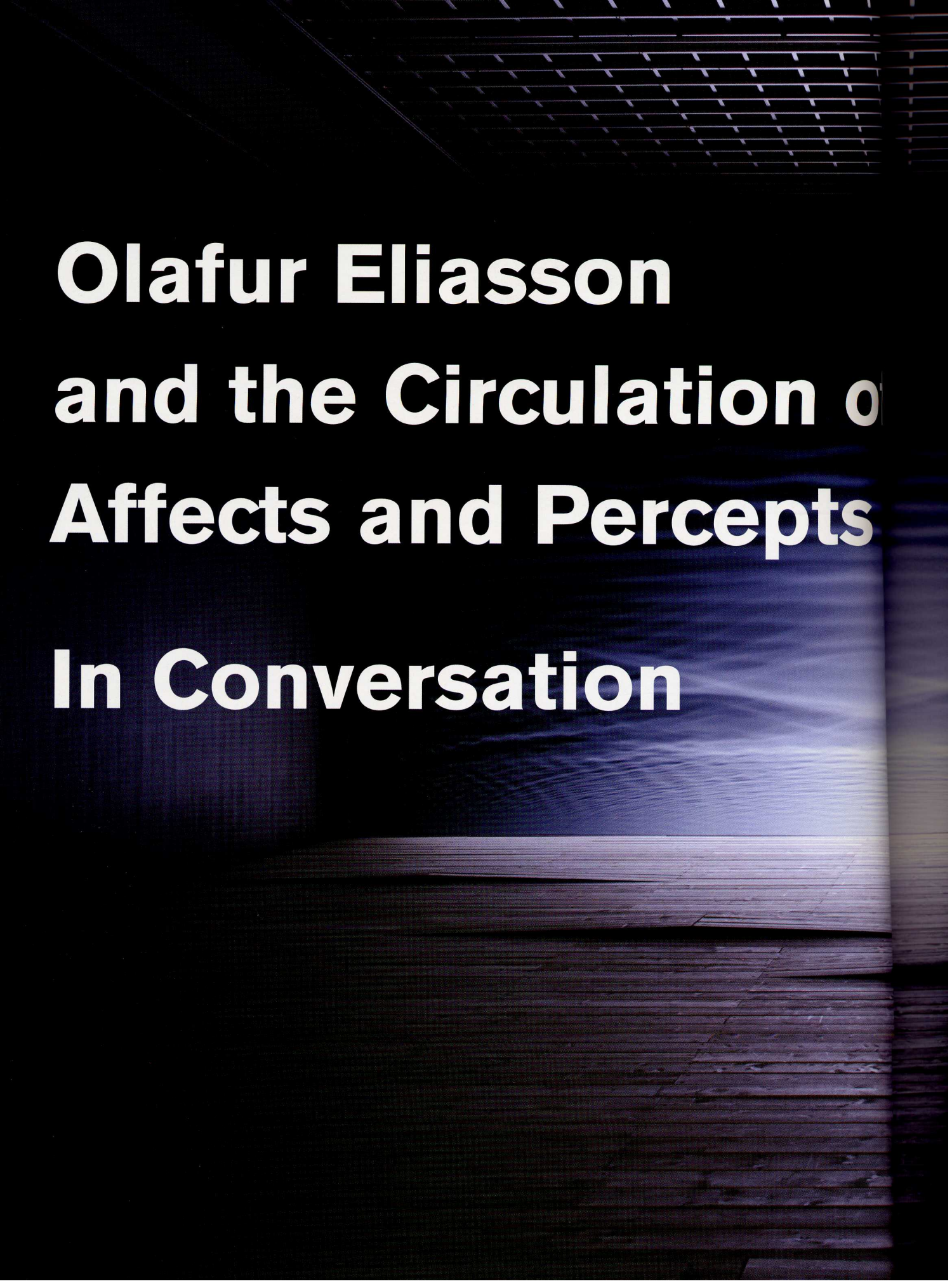
Ultimately, the MIX House offers its occupants the potential to 'know' the domestic environment in an unfamiliar way that calls into question traditional distinctions between nature and culture, music and noise. As John Cage has written: 'Wherever we are ... what we hear is mostly noise. When we ignore it, it disturbs us ... When we listen to it, we find it fascinating.'[4]



Sectional perspective from the back yard. The MIX House stretches out to its site boundaries to allow inventive interactions in the front yard, the back yard and in the sky.

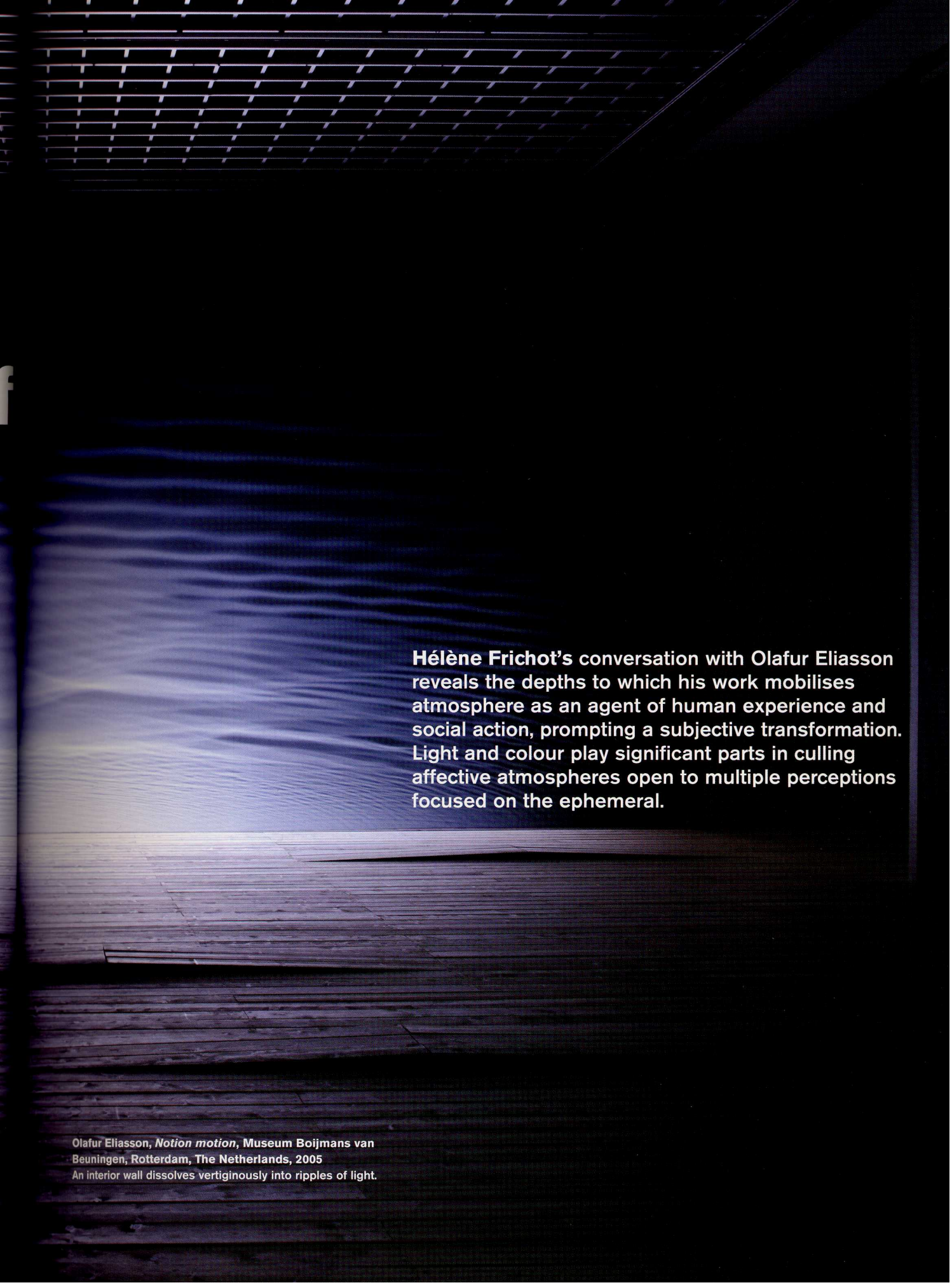
Notes

1. Ted Sheridan and Karen Van Lengen provide a useful overview of how traditional architecture was generated according to sonic principles in 'Hearing architecture, exploring and designing the aural environment', *Journal of Architectural Education*, Vol 57, November 2003, pp 37–44.
2. Emily Thompson, *The Soundscape of Modernity: Architectural Acoustics and the Culture of Listening in America 1900–1933*, MIT Press (Cambridge, MA), 2002.
3. Michael Bull, 'Auditory', in Caroline A Jones (ed), *Sensorium*, MIT Press (Cambridge, MA), 2006, pp 112–14.
4. John Cage, 'The future of music: Credo', in Dan Lander and Micah Lexier (eds), *Sound by Artists*, Art Metropole and Walter Phillips Gallery (Toronto), 1990, p 15.



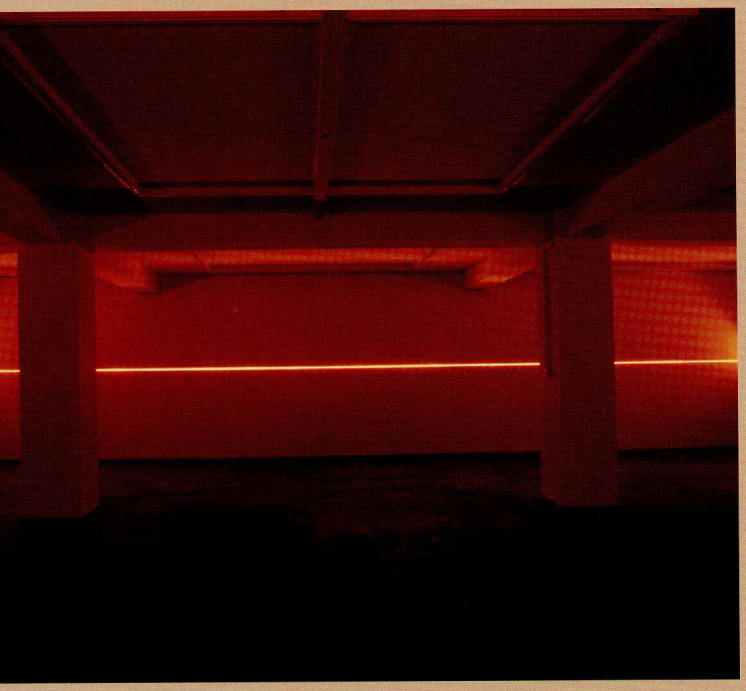
Olafur Eliasson and the Circulation of Affects and Percepts

In Conversation



Hélène Frichot's conversation with Olafur Eliasson reveals the depths to which his work mobilises atmosphere as an agent of human experience and social action, prompting a subjective transformation. Light and colour play significant parts in culling affective atmospheres open to multiple perceptions focused on the ephemeral.

Olafur Eliasson, *Notion motion*, Museum Boijmans van Beuningen, Rotterdam, The Netherlands, 2005
An interior wall dissolves vertiginously into ripples of light.



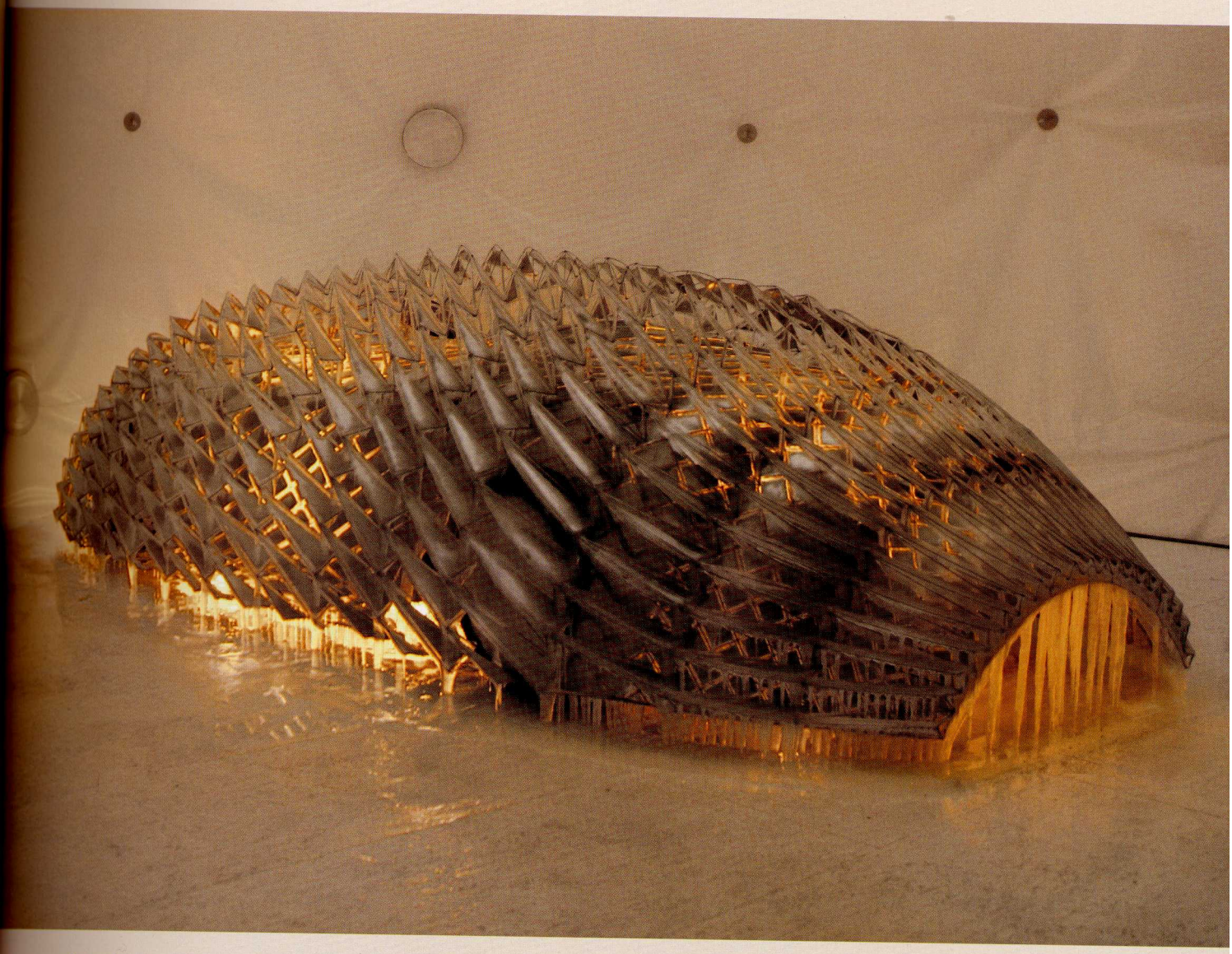
Olafur Eliasson, *Your activity horizon*, Reykjavik Art Museum, Iceland, 2004
A line of brilliant light shifts across a spectrum of colours creating an altered horizon of perception.

The work of Danish-Icelandic artist Olafur Eliasson is suffused with an internal atmosphere that profoundly impacts upon all those who experience it. Eliasson creates framed interior spaces that improbably reproduce an array of manufactured weather conditions and wild and moody landscapes. These atmospheric installations prove particularly compelling for interior and architectural designers, as affects and percepts are combined to constantly circulate and create an intimate relay between the artwork and those who enter into contact with it. Through the manipulation of colour, transparency and the reflection of light, Eliasson dissolves the material of interior space into the immaterial sensory quality of atmosphere and captures the receptive visitor in this embrace. A tentative theory of affect will be explored here in order to discover how Eliasson undertakes the mutual transformation of space, time and habitation.

The immaterial materials of atmosphere that Eliasson manipulates move beyond mere surface effect, opening up new formations of the social. This article draws on 'Life in Space', a midsummer forum held in June 2007 at Studio Olafur Eliasson, located in a former freight warehouse, which is adjacent to the Hamburger Bahnhof, Museum für Gegewart, a contemporary art museum in Berlin. The reoccurring themes of the longest day of the year included temporality, or the inexorable sensation of the passing of time; the status of reality; the primacy of the object, specifically in relation to the position of the art object in contemporary art, and the medium of the model and maquette; and the perception of colour and light, as exemplified by the phenomenon of photographic reproduction. These themes erupted as a collective conversation that developed openly among all the invited participants.

During the midsummer gathering, questions persistently arose around the subject of responsibility and ethics, and the contribution of art to new forms of sociability and community. The atmospheric pressure of Eliasson's work is such that it demands the visitor's engagement beyond that of a mere onlooker; it is an interaction that encourages the mutual transformation of both the visitor and the artwork. Most accounts of Eliasson's *The weather project*, housed in the Turbine Hall of Tate Modern (16 October 2003 to 21 March 2004), describe how visitors were sprawled across the ground, transfixed by the looming interior sun and the subtle shifts in light and humidity, as well as their own images reflected back to them from the mirrored ceiling high above. In discussing atmosphere, which has such a strong position in the artist's own vocabulary, a surprising but important link can be made

Olafur Eliasson, *The weather project*, Unilever Series, Turbine Hall, Tate Modern, London, 2003
Spectators are transfixed in the immense volume of the Turbine Hall, which is transformed into an interior landscape watched over by a warm sun and intermittent swathes of mist.



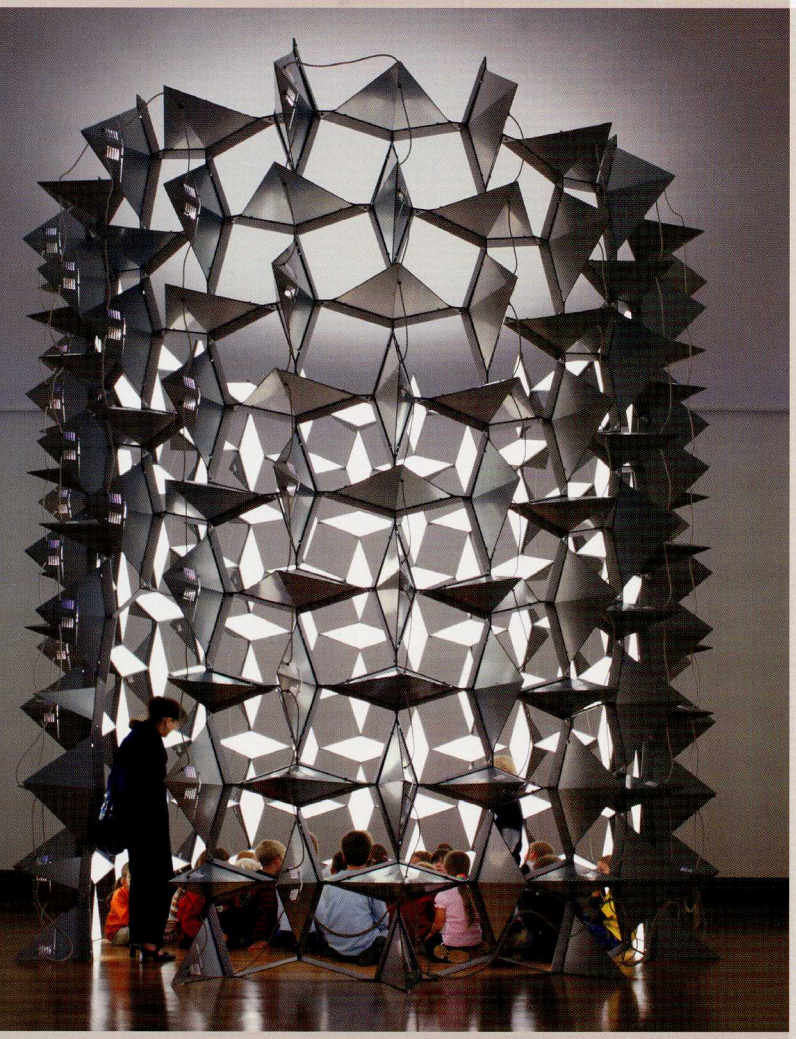
Olafur Eliasson, *Your mobile expectations: BMW H_2R project*, 2007
The new body of the BMW hydrogen-powered car is composed of two curved layers of intricately laced, reflective metal shards, which are augmented by a third layer composed entirely of ice.

with new models of social interaction. Eliasson's aspiration is that his studio should operate as an experimental laboratory open to outside influences and collaboration rather than as a 'closed cell'. Hence the importance of the symposium's location in his studio; the second of its kind, this invited symposium was supported by Eliasson's collaboration with the BMW Art Car programme.

The projects discussed in the greatest detail included Eliasson's transformation of the BMW H_2R hydrogen-powered car, entitled *Your mobile expectations: BMW H_2R project* (2007), as well as the Serpentine Pavilion, London (2007), which Eliasson collaborated on with the Snøhetta architect Kjetil Thorsen. The symposium experiment was curated to capture a microcosm of reality, and as Eliasson explained at its inception: 'I want to create this kind of coming together.' It became more apparent as the day progressed that for Eliasson atmosphere is inextricably linked with social encounter.

Light is one of the fundamental materials – albeit substance-less – that Eliasson manipulates across his *oeuvre*, from the *Notion motion* (2005) installation, where walls are rendered seemingly immaterial by way of effects of light, through to the horizon series, for example *Your activity horizon* (2004) and *Your black horizon* (2005), where space is split apart by the brilliant line of an artificial horizon. The second-person pronoun of the titles clearly places the ownership of the artwork with the beholder: the art is incomplete without the uncertainty of the one who perceives it.

After lunch on the day of the symposium, Eliasson asked the participants to quietly gather round and focus their attention unflinchingly on a wall of the studio. A studio



Olafur Eliasson, *The inverted shadow tower*, 2004
An interior pavilion flooded with light shelters a cluster of children.

assistant arranged for a projection to be cast on to the wall, which displayed a circling ring of blue dots. By increments it appeared that the blue dots transformed into orange smudges. Our optical apparatus completed the story, providing the orange afterglow, which is a mere perceptual illusion created by the passage of blue. Each spectator participated in the work not as a passive receiver of information, but as an active subjectivity contributing to the production of the percepts and affects of the event. Eliasson explained that each one of us is crucial to the completion of the story of light that unfolds. If each participant experiences a slightly different affect, it is through the negotiation of his or her perceptual disagreement that he or she manages to form a community of sorts.

In this context, affects must be understood not as mere emotions: I feel happy, I feel sad. Instead, affects are the transformative shifts in register that allow the subject to recognise his or her subjectivity in transformation or, as Eliasson puts it: 'We learn to see ourselves in a different light.' Affect is the movement between emotional registers rather than the emotion itself once it can be named. Likewise, the percept is less about the named perception than what happens in the encounter that causes a pure percept to emerge. The percept facilitates a landscape of sensation to unfurl. Eliasson's interior landscapes produce a powerful impact as they make visible the erstwhile imperceptible forces of a world. Even when he is manipulating the surface of an object such as the BMW H_2R hydrogen-powered car, the manner in which such objects are enclosed in their own environments is crucial. All that appears to remain of the BMW H_2R car that was delivered to Eliasson's studio in 2005 are the wheels, the interior frame of the driver's seat and the steering wheel. A filigree of reflective metal shards is laced in two layers to form a permeable carapace that replaces the original body of the car. The entire construction is kept in a controlled environment maintained at subzero temperatures. The surface of the car accretes a cloak of ice, including the formation of precarious icicles, and the augmented car is lit from within by an apocalyptic yellow glow. Operating as an omen of a future turned sour through environmental disaster, the project is intended to temporally relocate the visitor in an anticipated ice age. We become visitors from the past exposed to the future implications of our consumptive habits.

Eliasson's work also includes a series of pavilions, or follies, among which can be counted *The inverted shadow tower* (2004), *La situazione antispettiva* (*The antiperspective chamber*) (2003) and, most recently, his collaboration with Kjetil Thorsen of Snøhetta for the 2007 Serpentine Gallery Pavilion, London. In relation to his work on the Serpentine Pavilion, Eliasson explains that he is especially interested in the role of the model, not as a representative and lesser version of a reality yet to be realised, but as a reality in its own right. He argues that in addition to objects such as houses and artworks, 'we also find models of engagement, models of perception and reflection'. As models are steeped in political and individual intent, they contribute to new kinds of social relations that allow us to understand that 'what we have in common is that we are different'. To support this argument, the 2007 Serpentine Pavilion is not just a foray into the medium of architecture, but opens up a forum for a series of experimental events. Eliasson's work is optimistic in its provocation that together we can explore how future forms of community can be ventured through the distribution of the sensible, or else the way sensations are aroused through design and art practice and how these sensations impact on our shared as well as distinct social practices. Forms of community are not so much united under some common sense; instead they can share their differences through an experience of multifarious sensations.

If it can be said that we suffer a contemporary waning of affect in our contemporary world of empty consumerism, then it is only through art such as Eliasson's, with its atmospheric augmentations, that we return to a realm of affect and percept. This increases our capacity for existing well in a

Olafur Eliasson, Serpentine Gallery Pavilion, **London, 2007**
Set in Kensington Gardens, the pavilion spirals up to the level of the surrounding tree canopy.

The interior is intended to create a forum for events and the promise of open discussion. A ramp rises gently creating a promenade up through the pavilion for the visitor.

world. Affect becomes active rather than passive in the midst of encounters between all kinds of bodies: architectural bodies, natural bodies, bodies of water and air, and human and animal bodies. The provocation to a positive activation of affect is managed by Eliasson through quite simple means: the calculated distribution of light that is captured, projected and reflected; the management of water that is more or less fluid or viscous, even frozen. These means, as well as so many ephemera of duration, allow being to exfoliate as becoming so that fixed subjectivities can transform within a living world. We pass into the landscape as the landscape passes through us. Eliasson insists: 'I am not so interested in temporality, except as it relates to being part of the world.' The experiments he undertakes are not for the sake of mere art; they aspire to offer new kinds of engagement with a world fraught with social and environmental concerns. The question of individual and collective spatial experience in a world, and how this can be manifested through interior atmosphere, is fundamental to Eliasson's ongoing experimentation. ⍙