Instead, he locates the importance of his objects within their potential for “applicability,” which he defines as their active engagement and redefinition of the space they inhabit, and which is reflected in the captions that accompany each work.

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7. Ibid., p. 84.

8. Ibid., p. 85.
Communality

One of the subplots to my work over the last few years has been the peculiar legacy of communal thinking that developed in the West in the decade just before and just after the interlude of early modernism. The United States often a trope and exemplary case in relation to the idea of smallish groups of people getting together in order to live eighty differently from everyone else. There is a history of communal prototypes there, that is part of “American exceptionalism.” While the term is originally attributed to Alexis de Tocqueville, it has been in wide use in recent years, notably in Martin Lipset’s book of the same name, which addresses, among other things, the reasons why “societies have never taken hold in the United States” and why “American religion and foreign policy have a moralistic, crusading streak.”

The development of social space in most of the United States since the collapse of the Socialist Party in the 1912 presidential election has been marked by a drive away from modern collectivist social thinking and progressive action, but at all points there have been correctives to this process and fragmented echoes of alternative visions. One such peculiarity is Looking Backward 2000–1887 (1888), by Edward Bellamy, a book notable both for its proposal of a postcapitalist utopia and its archaic style. Another (even clunkier) text is Walden Two (1948), by R. B. Shapley, written in the gap between World War II and the Cold War.

In 2000 I was invited to produce a work for the Norwegian state telecom company, Telenor. The timing of the commission coincided with the partial privatization of what was formerly a publicly owned resource. A large text cube, wall design, and ceiling text designated a foyer as a place to consider the way ethical shifts leave their trace in the built world. At the time I was studying Thomas More’s Utopia and Skinner’s applied neo-utopian vision toward the completion of my own compressed book, Literally No Place (2002). Walden Two provides a glimpse of poetry—a moment that synthesizes the contradictory value systems circling around the book—when a visitor to Somm’s behavioralist stops stops for a moment to consider the implications of what he has witnessed and how things should proceed personally and socially: “MY STEP WAS LIGHT AND I COULD FEEL THE BALL OF EACH FOOT PUSHING THE EARTH DOWN FROM ME AS I WALKED.”

For Projects 79, the Norwegian thinking has been developed and clarified: a text cube functioning somewhere between a sign for a nonevent and an announcement of intentions; a ceiling text that looks forward to an abstraction of a location or setting that echoes an environment where there are still options in terms of direction and development. Something designed for a lobby. A work intended as a backdrop.

One of the great battles of the twentieth century was between speculation and planning. For the most part, speculation, often heavily subsidized, seems to have won. This work is intended to function as a moment of pause—all backdrop and foreground with an absent central core of ideas to be tweaked and reconstructed by visitors to the space. For a couple of years I carried a column titled “Lobby” for the magazine Art/Text. The use of the world was deliberate, telegraphing an interest in the battle for control of the middle ground.

Liam Gillick
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biography and exhibitions

Liam Gillick (b. 1964, Aylesbury, Great Britain) was educated at Goldsmiths College, University of London. He has taught at Columbia University, New York, since 1997.


