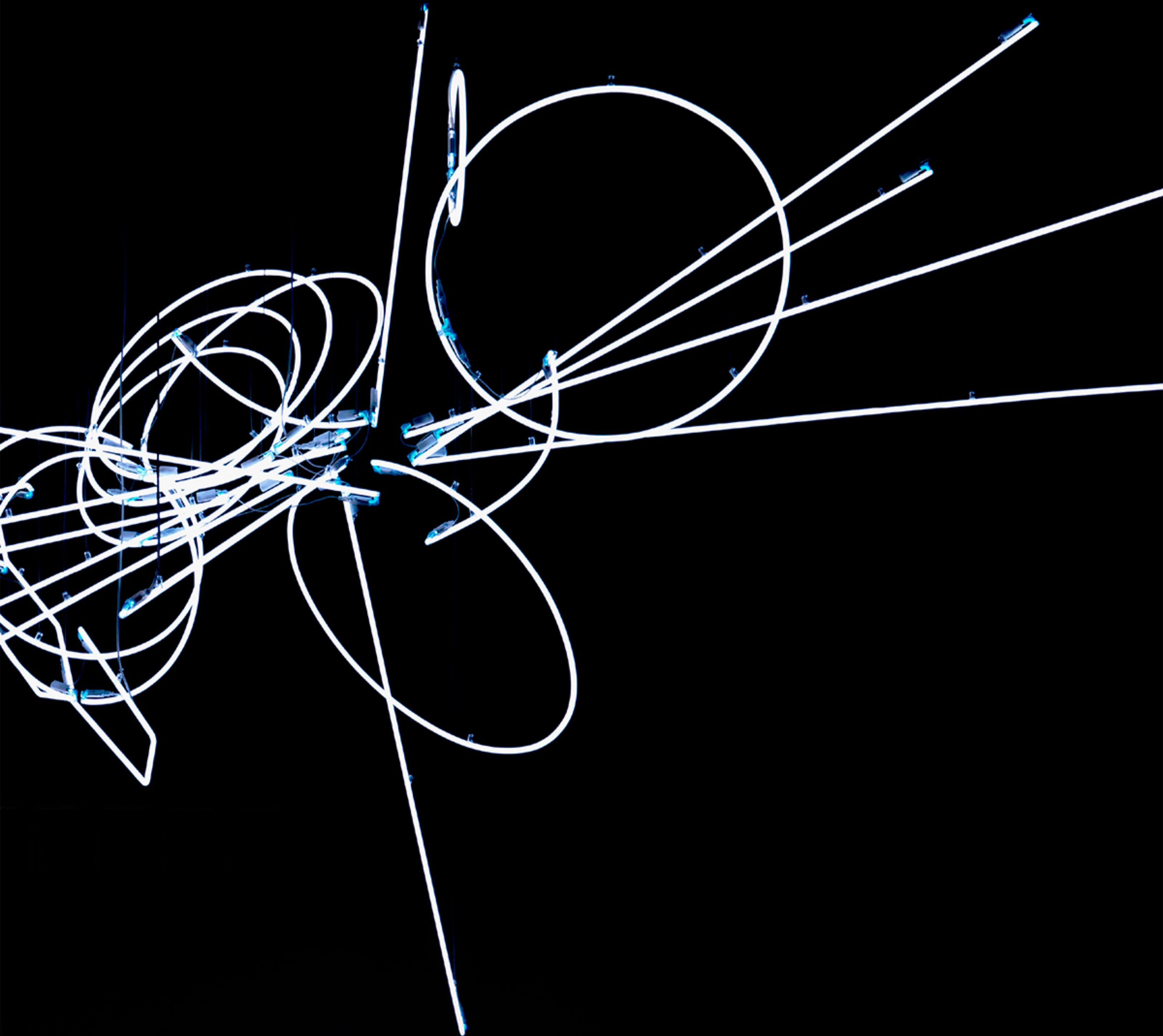


Cerith Wyn Evans

The
What
If
?...
Scenario
(after LG)



Cerith Wyn Evans

The What If ?... Scenario (after LG)

Nothing Is More Real Than Nothing

Wild trajectories discharging in various directions, some traces curling back in semi-circles toward the nucleus of the collision, recoiling from an invisible force field, others splitting into the room, down to the visitor's eye level, baring each minute wire, fixture, fluorescent tube. Myriad filigree cables carry the weight of this weightless object and seemingly give life to it much like a marionette while projecting onto the ceiling an accumulation of joints and fixtures resembling a celestial map.

A Community Predicated on the Basic Fact Nothing Really Matters, the new abstract neon work created by Cerith Wyn Evans for *The What If?... Scenario* (after LG) at the Augarten, is in fact a communality of dynamic forces and forms without recognizable hierarchy or sequence, except for a definite centrifugal urge. A representation of a particle collision resulting in a Higgs boson event served as the visual evocation for Wyn Evans's new work. This underlying image visualizes a simulation of a Higgs event as projected a few years ago, before the Large Hadron Collider (LHC) began producing actual data at CERN's beam point under the auspiciously green fields of the Swiss canton of Geneva. Most of the trajectories adopted and recreated as the physical elements of the neon are, in the words of the particle physicist Maria Spiropulu, "just the junk." Only four of the beams in the simulation (the beams of four muons) represent indicators of a possible Higgs event and are as such of interest to the scientists. The rest are traces of particles that have been observed since the 1960s and no longer stop the hearts of CERN's researchers. Only one collision in ten billion results in a Higgs event.

Nonetheless the junk has become an integral part of a work of art, having caught the eye of an artist who by no means arbitrarily captures the weak links, the nonevents, the flickers, the paraphernalia of the cosmos surrounding him. The other main element of the neon work is an adumbration of a molecular structure inspired by the chiral (i.e., not superimposable on its mirror image) compound lysergic acid diethylamide, or LSD, the psychotropic agent synthesized by Albert Hofmann in 1938. It presents an anamorphic distortion of the actual diagram, staging a perspectival shift that hints at an impossible ideal angle to be adopted by the observer or else at the fact that perspective is always relative, especially if you are looking at a hallucinogen.

It is in this fissure—in this rupture of the definitely recognizable, the measurable, the calibration, the text, the equation—that Wyn Evans's works comfortably situate themselves. In his new work, as in the method of the exhibition itself, he offers not so much estimations of *The What If?... Scenario* but rather its tools, playground equipment for endless experiments, dreamachines (in reference to Brion

Gysin and following conceptual ancestors such as Raoul Hausmann's untitled basket light, 1928, and László Moholy-Nagy's *Light-Space Modulator*, 1930). Using the remarkable hybrid structures of LSD and the Higgs, he has created an extraordinary agent for these field trips.

The catalogue published on occasion of the Augarten exhibition follows the trajectories of multiple beams and attempts not to explicate but rather to implicate, complicate, and be complicit in a number of what-if scenarios. The LHC lends itself to the idea that it constitutes the ultimate dreamachine and *What If?... Scenario* (a term borrowed from Liam Gillick, whose Scenario Reports from 1996 are published here). The Higgs boson—as we learned on our field trip to CERN—is the particle that supposedly gives mass to the universe, that possibly validates the Standard Model of particle physics (conceived in the 1960s and “too beautiful” to abandon for the small flaw that it postulates an inconceivable universe without mass). Without the Higgs, *nothing really matters*.

The Higgs itself, however, is an afterthought, the materialization of wishful thinking in the sense that the LHC at CERN—the largest laboratory ever built—is constructed entirely on the fiction of a simulated projection of this missing particle whose necessity was postulated long before its discovery. Following data that showed a strong concurrence of the simulated scenarios with the detector's actual results, on July 4, 2012, contingently one year to the day before the opening of *The What If?... Scenario*, the discovery of the Higgs boson was publicly announced. Spiropulu, however, explains: “The events we call ‘Higgs events’ are actually Higgs candidate events. They do not come with a label that says, ‘I am a Higgs for sure.’ They have a high probability of being a Higgs (according to the selection rules we apply). The analysis of the events is statistical.”¹

What Wyn Evans offers, along these lines, are candidate events: on “hinterlogical” paths (to quote Carsten Höller), we make our way to a psychotropical paradise. At CERN, we are shown an oblong object that is as clear as glass and as heavy as lead. This lead tungstate crystal, which has the ability to stop particles due to its high density but also yields light, allowing photodetectors to record the particles, seems to be a kind of hinterlogical being, a form of ephemeral gravity, its own antithesis and a marriage of opposites, which also seems to attract Wyn Evans. The epiphany of CERN—the evidence that reality now confirms the simulation—is a future anterior, a nostalgic temporal loop that has again deeply interested the artist. Conversations with Cerith are always also eulogies of times and companions past. (*And if I don't meet you no more in this world / Then I'll, I'll meet you in the next one / And don't be late, don't be late.*) At his studio in London (which used to be the headquarters of the International Society for Krishna Awareness, cofounded by George Harrison), we watch Wyn Evans's film *Epiphany* (1984). It has unwittingly become a memorial to a generation of young men, many of whom were lost to the AIDS virus. There is a painful melancholia in the experience of Wyn Evans reciting Molly Nesbit quoting Elizabeth Bishop rephrasing Felicia Hemans's poem “Casabianca” (“Love's the boy stood on the burning deck / trying to recite ‘The boy

stood on / the burning deck.' Love's the son / stood stammering elocution / while the poor ship in flames went down.") There is an ecstasy in watching the Dior spring/summer 2003 haute couture show on YouTube with him or Grace Jones's Hula-Hooping performance of "Slave to the Rhythm" for the Queen's Jubilee. "I'm so spot off," says Cerith.

In a conversation with Molly Nesbit for this catalogue, Wyn Evans inquires about Duchamp's use of the word *nothing*. Is it written with a capital *N* or not? Nesbit replies with a quote by Max Stirner: "Je n'ai mis ma cause en Rien" ("Ich hab' mein Sach' auf nichts gestellt," I have based my cause on Nothing). Martin Prinzhorn ponders the ambiguity of the new neon's title, "which may refer either to a Nothing that is of great consequence or to the notion that nothing at all is of consequence." Olaf Nicolai states that "there cannot be an aesthetic experience 'as such'—in other words, without object." Jeannie Moser, in contrast, discussing Hofmann's first encounter with LSD, writes: "Depending on the dose and the 'set and setting,' the chemical agent may even produce sensory experiences lacking any objective correspondence. Separating themselves from their spatial points of reference, the objects become atopic." Wyn Evans (along with Florian Hecker, in the artists' collaboration for *No night No day*) is monadically busy "unmaking worlds," in the words of Robin Mackay. A game of severed references and objects without a story—"the rubbing of nothing against nothing," as Wyn Evans describes the structural-materialist films of his friend and tutor Peter Gidal—but nonetheless there is something that causes all these voices to reflect on the lack, disturbance, or overdrive of reference, on the relation between the inner and outer sensorium, and to create their own polyvocal cacophony of universes, be they aesthetic, scientific, psychotropic, simulated, structural, statistical, or otherwise. "Nothing is more real than nothing."²

The What If?... Scenario is a futurist utopian endeavor of highly nostalgic nature, which embraces and celebrates failure, miscommunication, and polyphonic smudges while presenting itself in the most glamorous fashion imaginable. It conjures a plethora of background voices and draws visitors closer to the glowing heat of the light columns like doomed insects. One of its main traits, although this becomes noticeable only with a latency, is rhythm, timing, pulse. Not only the Morse code–animated lights silently flitter their beats, the untitled columns too are structured into cadenced elements, and the reader, finally, following the slow communiqués of the machines, becomes "slave to the rhythm." One of the polyrhythmic voices never completely missing from Wyn Evans's pulsating universe is Samuel Beckett. And he too, it seems, has anticipated the crucial importance of the Higgs boson for *A Community Predicated on the Basic Fact Nothing Really Matters*: "All of old. Nothing else ever. Ever tried. Ever failed. No matter. Try again. Fail again. Fail better."³

2. Samuel Beckett, *Malone Dies* (New York: Grove, 1956), 16.

3. Samuel Beckett, *Worstward Ho* (London: John Calder, 1983), 7.