

The Vast and the Void On Tate Modern's Turbine Hall and 'The Unilever Series'

Wouter Davidts

Installations should empty rooms, not fill them.

Robert Smithson¹

You don't show emptiness. You show the wish for it to be full. There is nothing rewarding in emptiness.

Juan Muñoz²

In 2005, Tate Modern published a report evaluating the first five years of the institution's existence. In the introduction, entitled 'A New Landmark', director Sir Nicholas Serota states with pride that Tate Modern has turned out to be one of the capital's most favourite buildings. 'In five years', Serota notes, 'more than twenty million visitors have taken possession of the building itself, notably enjoying the experience of being in the great Turbine Hall'.³ Throughout the other essays in the report the public success of Tate Modern is invariably coupled to the existence of the Turbine Hall, the large entry-space to the museum. In 'A New Space for a New Art', Martin Gayford labels 'the huge cavern of the Turbine Hall' as 'the most startling and novel feature' of the new museum and an 'unprecedented' space for the display of art.⁴ Ron Smith, in 'The Political Impact of Tate Modern', believes that the building is one of the few that 'take[s] your breath away - especially when you walk into the Turbine Hall for the first time'. While the 'sheer scale' of the space is fascinating, its 'vastness [...] means that even with huge numbers coming, the building happily absorbs them'. Smith subsequently reads the space's potential to house and gather a huge crowd as an expression of the gallery's ambition 'to make

the case for openness, for inclusion, for welcoming all comers'. The space allows the institution to 'includ[e] those who may be new to modern art but have come simply to marvel at the space and the architecture. Tate Modern tempts them in to see the building, and then shows them the art too. And many will come away liking it'.⁵

Throughout the report of 2005, the Turbine Hall is invariably portrayed as one of the most important features of Tate Modern. The colossal space apparently succeeds in generating a perfect marriage of architectural ambitions and institutional desires on the one hand, and architectural achievements and institutional triumphs on the other, allowing both the *institution* and the *building* to emerge as vastly successful. In 'Architecture in Motion', architecture critic Rowan Moore examines the different merits and qualities of the building. One of the main reasons why 'Time Out' readers voted Tate Modern their favourite London building in 2005, Moore argues, is 'the generosity of its space'. The Turbine Hall, he continues, 'is a huge free gift to the public. Imposing though it is, it does not dictate to visitors how they should experience it, which, in a time when public space is used ever more intensively to market, to sell and to deliver messages, is a precious quality'. The 'relative reticence' of the design by the architects Herzog & de Meuron, not only added to the success and popularity of the building, but also left 'the place open to interpretations by artists'. Moore finds proof in 'The Unilever Series', the art installation series that Tate Modern initiated after striking a substantial

sponsorship deal with the Anglo-Dutch consumer goods giant Unilever in 1999. Since the museum opened in 2000, it has commissioned each year a new piece of sculpture for the 500 foot (155m) long, 75 foot (23m) wide and 115 foot (35m) high Turbine Hall.⁶ The American sculptor Louise Bourgeois was the first to 'tackle' the space in 2000, followed by Juan Muñoz ('Double Bind', 2001), Anish Kapoor ('Marsyas', 2002), Olafur Eliasson ('The Weather Project', 2003), Bruce Nauman ('Raw Materials', 2004), Rachel Whiteread ('Embankment', 2005) and Carsten Höller ('Test Site', 2006). Doris Salcedo's most recent intervention opens in October 2007. 'The Unilever Series', Moore lyrically suggests, 'are not part of the architecture, but they are the fulfilment of the architect's intentions'.⁷

The past seven installations of 'The Unilever Series' make up a rather diverse palette of artworks. All of the invited artists reacted to the commission in a rather idiosyncratic manner, producing works that differ radically from one another on a formal, material and conceptual level. In fact at first sight there is not much that ties the different works together other than the space that they were commissioned for, which each artist claimed to have been intimidated by when receiving the invitation. While Juan Muñoz called the space 'a killer' and his successor Anish Kapoor described it as a 'very complicated space that was not made to host art', Olafur Eliasson labelled it as the direct outcome of 'the development of unfocused and undesignated space' in museums in the last two decades.⁸ Rachel Whiteread in turn disclosed that 'it was very daunting' to occupy the space, whereas Nauman experienced the task as 'extremely difficult' since he had to cope with a space in which 'you can't fake it'.⁹ None of the artists had, in fact, ever been commissioned to conceive a piece for a space of such dimensions.¹⁰ All of them did, indeed, struggle with the size of the Turbine Hall and came up with their proper strategies to tackle it. But without doing too much injustice to the different artists and the particularities

of their respective installations, one can say that in all cases this led to a major leap in scale in the work, whether it was through enlargement, expansion, multiplication, amplification or mere inflation. Louise Bourgeois used the hall simply as a large gallery, but made, in addition to the 'three gigantic steel towers', her 'biggest spider ever'.¹¹ The late Juan Muñoz didn't resize his familiar figurines, but substantially expanded the environment in which he placed them. 'Double Bind' split up the second part of the hall with a massive floor, serving as a vast support structure for a dozen of his well-known introvert characters. With the spectacular 'The Weather Project' Olafur Eliasson successfully transposed his previous mostly small-scale perceptual and sensory investigations to the size of the Turbine Hall, transforming the latter with a mirrored ceiling, a bright yellow artificial sun and puffs of smoke, creating a magical environment which has by now become legendary. Since the work exceeded the size of his previous commissions, Eliasson was forced to change to a bigger studio for its production.¹² Rachel Whiteread faced the difficulty to scale up her celebrated strategy of casting to the size of the Turbine Hall. During the preparations of 'Embankment', she expressed her worry that it was 'a lot of space to fill'.¹³ Ultimately, she opted for an object of bodily scale - a cardboard box - and multiplied it. The resulting 14,000 casts of different boxes were stacked to occupy the second half of the Turbine Hall and created a massive labyrinth-like structure. Even Bruce Nauman, who made the most intangible intervention with the audio-installation of 'Raw Materials', succumbed to the temptation of grasping the Turbine Hall as a whole. Although the work left the Hall physically empty, merely using sound to occupy it, it nevertheless reinforced the largeness of the space. Carsten Höller pragmatically resized one of his illustrious sculptures for 'Test Site'. The artist provided the museum with four slides that took visitors from different floors to the ground level of the Turbine Hall. In previous years, Höller had installed six other versions of these slides, starting

at the Kunst-Werke Berlin during the 1998 Berlin Biennale, and later in Milan, New York, Boston and Helsinki. The slides in Tate Modern were simply the largest. The most straightforward example of sculptural inflation was Anish Kapoor's 'Marsyas', an elusive, trumpet-shaped sculpture, made of red synthetic membrane that stretched from one side of the Turbine Hall to the other. The work grew so big that its bigness came to be regarded as a feat in itself. While the 'Evening Standard' played upon the century-old Anglo-French rivalry by remarking that 'Marsyas' 'dwarfed the Concorde', 'The Times' noted that 'Kapoor's colossal sculpture' was almost as high as Nelson's column, and as long as 17.5 double-decker buses. 'The Independent' in turn observed that it was longer than the Cross Channel Car Ferry. Adrian Searle's review in 'The Guardian' however summed it up best, stating that the work 'managed something difficult - to be at once stupid and unforgettable'.¹⁴

The following article is an attempt to examine what giant artworks, such as 'Marsyas' and the other sculptural interventions in the Turbine Hall, after the major leap in size and scale they have performed, still manage to be, to accomplish, or to communicate? It is quite remarkable that none of them actually engaged on a substantial - i.e. semantic - level with the building, the institution Tate Modern, let alone the institution's broader cultural, economical or political context. All of the actual installations bore witness to a rather literal or physical use of Tate Modern's Turbine Hall as a site, in contrast to the more functional or discursive approach that marks most contemporary art installations.¹⁵ The artists of 'The Unilever Series' literally stayed inside and tried to fill the space, whether it was with steel sculptures, synthetic forms, ambient light, sound or playthings. So we inevitably face the question of what these works offered, besides an often undeniably spectacular and memorable art experience. Can we still speak of a significant, let alone critical, encounter between the different parties involved:

art, architecture, institution and public? At least in terms of the last, 'The Unilever Series' turned out to be vastly successful. The installations often drew bigger crowds than many of the institution's exhibitions - with a remarkable 2.3 million visitors in six months for Olafur Eliasson's 'The Weather Project'.¹⁶ While some regarded the Series' attractiveness as the ultimate proof of the idea that 'great art can be popular', others discard it as the final capitulation of installation art to the demands and logic of the culture industry and the ultimate subsumption of the latter's early critical ambitions.¹⁷ Neither the populist faith in art's broader appeal nor the by-now familiar laments about the spectacular competition between art institutions and the resulting architectural and artistic gigantism is yet very useful for an analysis of enterprises like 'The Unilever Series'. Whereas the former silences all substantial criticism of them, the latter inhibits an assessment of their complex reality. In many respects, we are obliged to take them seriously, if only for the fact that they exist and will not disappear soon, and for the huge amounts of money, space and attention they consume.

Kitchenette or cathedral

But wait. What about really big art? Big enough to be heard over the guilty giggles and sticking far above the shoulders of those slacker slouches? Big stuff that makes you wonder what it cost, even in a time when money is out of control. [...] Big is what matters. Big isn't everything, but may be the only thing that will get noticed. The only thing that might compete with the din of style in its roar of ubiquitous, mutating manifestations.

Robert Morris¹⁸

Notwithstanding its unique character, 'The Unilever Series' is symptomatic of a recent international trend. As one of the largest art commissions in the artworld, taking place in arguably the largest museum space in the world, and given to a group of widely acclaimed contemporary artists, it is nevertheless not alone in its genre. In recent years, the

world has witnessed the launch of ever-larger art commissions for increasingly vast spaces, resulting in all the more colossal artworks, from the Guggenheim Bilbao to Dia:Beacon in New York and the Gasometer in Oberhausen. In 2007, the city of Paris announced a new yearly commission for the central nave of the Grand Palais, appropriately entitled 'Monumenta'.¹⁹

In the 2004 article 'No More Scale. The Experience of Size in Contemporary Sculpture', the American art historian and critic James Meyer discusses the contemporary artworld's demand for an art of size. In his opinion, it's the deplorable outcome of the artworld's spectacularisation and expansionism throughout the last decade and the parallel profusion of large international exhibitions and 'destination' museums of inordinately vast proportions. Meyer refers to Hal Foster's remark on the Guggenheim Bilbao in 2001 that 'to make a big splash in the global pond of spectacle culture today, you need to have a big rock to drop'.²⁰ And such a 'big rock', Meyer continues, 'must in turn be filled with works of adequate size, spectacular works, works, in short, that can deliver an audience: wall-size video/film projections, oversize photographs, a sculpture that overwhelms'.²¹

Meyer sets off his article with a critique of Olafur Eliasson's 'The Weather Project' of 2003. He points out that many of Eliasson's works recall 'the phenomenological debates around Minimalism and the various practices of institutional critique they inspired' and aim at a similar criticality and reflexivity. But notwithstanding the catalogue and publicity's proclamation of the project's critical and reflexive aims and the installation's straightforward disclosure of its 'construction', 'The Weather Project', Meyer argues, failed in its ambition. Despite the dutiful rehearsal of 'the tactics of institutional critique', it did not engage an active and self-reflexive spectator, but merely delivered 'a mass audience that cannot fail to be overwhelmed by the magnitude of the

installation itself'. But then Meyer faithfully repeats the by now three decades old adage of institutional critique, i.e. that every artistic intervention must resist or critically disclose the conditions of display. He blames Eliasson's project for the fact that '[t]he museum is not so much "revealed" as transformed into a destination, an event'. 'The Weather Project', he notes, 'is hardly unique in this regard. More and more, we are accustomed to installations that are keyed not to the individual body and its perceptual grasp but to an increasingly grandiloquent architecture'. In trying to compete with the size of the many pompous contemporary museum buildings and spaces, art has lost any sense of scale. Where once scale, according to Meyer, 'implied a calibrated relation between a viewer and work within a modernist gallery of knowable proportions', in many contemporary art practices 'a scale that exceeds our perceptual understanding - i.e. size - has become prevalent'. Since the present-day concept of installation has increasingly come to depend on the experience of size, 'the phenomenological and critical ambitions of an earlier period' are at risk.²² All art that engages with sizeable spaces, Meyer seems to suggest, is bound to be complicit with the cultural and institutional agendas that have informed and still govern the space, to fail to sustain a critical stance within it, and ultimately to fall short in providing the viewer with a significant experience. In other words, big is bad by definition. Meyer acknowledges the countercultural meaning of size in the antimonuments of Claes Oldenburg, the large Earthworks of Michael Heizer and Robert Smithson, and the ephemeral outdoor projects of such artists as Dennis Oppenheim and Alice Aycock, as these suggested a kind of art that could not be easily bought nor exhibited within the white cube. But he does not cease to advocate a phenomenological sense of scale. Size is marshalled in art to 'overwhelm and pacify', while scale, on the condition that it returns 'in the phenomenological sense as a formal quality', will be 'capable of inducing awareness and provoking thought'.²³ To Meyer, it is not

architecture but the viewer's body that is the reference, that sets the standard.

The clear-cut opposition between architectural scale and somatic scale, however, is based upon a limited understanding of the role of size and scale in architecture. It fails to acknowledge that they are not mutually exclusive, and that size in architecture does not necessarily rule out somatic sensibility or awareness. To put it simply, not all big buildings and big spaces 'dwarf' their visitors. As far as scale is concerned, the sheer physical size of a building or structure is not a critical issue in itself. Scale is by definition relational and perceptual. In architectural scale it is the relationship of the parts to the whole that is at issue.²⁴ Moreover, Meyer's plea for a notion of scale that entails 'a constant adjustment adequate to particular sculptural ideas', does not exclude architecture either. Because what happens if 'particular sculptural ideas' relate to architecture, an architectural object, even a big one?²⁵

In a recent conversation between Olafur Eliasson and the French artist Daniel Buren, a widely known protagonist of institutional critique, the latter stated that his 'philosophy is that I could engage a kitchenette or a cathedral, but the work has to be in scale with the space'. While Buren expressed his reservations about those works 'that have become spectacular for their own sake', he stressed that 'if I agree to make a work in a place that's a priori spectacular, my work has to have at least an aspect of that'. Working in spectacular or gigantic spaces does not mean 'that you can't make a conflict or a contradiction or even open up a question about the space'.²⁶ Buren suggests in other words that, although all giant artworks run the risk of being complicit with the needs of the museum in a global climate of spectacular competition, they are not immediately suspect. It is first and foremost a matter of critically relating the artwork to the size of the space the artist is confronted with, and finding the right scale. From this perspective, Meyer's criticism

itself is marked by an omission that is quite revealing. Meyer builds his argument on a thoughtful reading of the phenomenological ambitions of 1960's Minimalism and its attention to the bodily presence, awareness and perception of the viewer in space. But he fails to expand his argument with the critical extension of the minimalist conception of space by institutional critique, which is the shift from space as a formal and abstract container towards space as a contingent entity: a crucial shift that identified the *specificity* of a given site or context. In its ambition to reveal the dense though often imperceptible weave of political, cultural and economic interests that determine the reception of a work of art in the museum and gallery, institutional critique repeatedly addressed the specific architectural character of these places, as if to convey the value architectural space accords to its objects. Meyer, however, seems to consider this to be only a task for artists. It is up to them to 'reveal' the actual role and significance of a space. But the obligation goes both ways. In order to fully criticise a work, a profound understanding of the work's actual context is indispensable on the part of the critic as well. It is too simple to blame the artworks for not critically engaging with the space and failing to convey a self-reflexive spectator. The contribution and impact of the architecture needs to be brought into account as well. But this is precisely what is lacking in Meyer's analysis and criticism of the different artistic interventions, and Eliasson's in particular, in Tate Modern's Turbine Hall. His only description of the Turbine Hall is that the space is 'enormous'. How that 'enormousness' in reality manifests itself, is not mentioned.

In the introductory essay to the catalogue of Carsten Höller's 'Test Site', Tate Modern curator Jessica Morgan rightfully suggests that 'it is not sufficient [to] argue that the problem lies in creating the Turbine Hall and in particular in designating it as an art space'. It seems 'oddly perverse', Morgan continues, 'to insist on an experience of art as limited to a certain scale or to a particular type of apprecia-

tion'.²⁷ It is even more inappropriate to simply claim that the space is too big. In order to fully criticise the role of the Turbine Hall's size and scale and its impact on the different artworks and installations that have occupied it so far, a substantial analysis of its peculiar architectural character and constitution is indispensable. The space is far more than a mere abstract emblem of the global inflation and growth of museum and exhibition spaces. It is rather a particular exponent of this tendency, with a distinct architectural form and appearance. Before one can actually criticise the gigantism of both the space and the artworks, it is necessary to illuminate what constitutes the gigantism in both cases, and how it mutually informs them.

Turbine Hall

Even now, when they look at the building, many people think: 'what have they actually done?'. Because they don't know that actually there was nothing there - it was full up with machinery. A large part of our work consisted in clearing up [...]. And then we actually invented the building as a museum. But this invention of the building always kept close to what was actually there.

Jacques Herzog ²⁸

When the Tate Gallery announced its decision to locate the new branch for modern and contemporary art in the Bankside Power Station, designed by Sir Giles Gilbert Scott, it provided a double motivation. Firstly, the institution wanted to make a difference in the international museum league. Whereas fellow-institutions such as the Centre Pompidou in Paris, the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles, the Guggenheim in Bilbao and the Museum of Modern Art in New York opted for a purpose-built structure or a brand new extension, the Tate preferred the conversion of an existing building.²⁹ A questionnaire that was sent to artists worldwide while the project was being drawn up, revealed that most artists, when asked which spaces they preferred to exhibit in, favoured day-lit conversions of existing buildings,

where architectural intervention was minimal.³⁰ In an interview with Cynthia Davidson for the magazine 'Any' in 1996, Serota states that 'the experience of the last 20 years' has revealed 'that some of the best installations of contemporary art have been made in converted warehouse buildings'.³¹ Tate Modern was not to become an architectural *prima donna* or a signature building, but a museum that would suit the needs and desires of contemporary art and artists, a building with 'sufficient patina [...]' for the art to be comfortable rather than simply on show'.³² Secondly, the choice for an existing building was driven by more pragmatic reasons. The Tate would never have had the resources to erect a new building of such size and magnitude on a different site in the centre of London. But the benefits were not merely financial either. It also allowed the institution to bypass the destructive political and administrative rows that affect most large new buildings in London.

Whereas the pragmatic grounds sounded reasonable, the motivation in terms of artistic preference radically conflicted with the chosen building. In reality, the Bankside Power Station did not correspond to a customary warehouse building at all. The only space in which initially - i.e. before the conversion - the architectural specificity of the Bankside Power Station could be experienced, was the giant Turbine Hall in the middle. Both the Boiler House and the Switch House, respectively at the left and right side of the Turbine Hall, were completely filled to the ceiling with heavy industrial equipment and machinery. Once these were removed, the building emerged as a colossal spatial envelope, supported by a steel skeleton and enclosed by a thin brick skin. Eventually the power station was just a large and empty hall of such size that there was simply no architecture to be converted. It simply did not provide the loft-like spaces that the Tate so much advocated as the primary reason for its choice of building. To transform the building into a functional museum with regular galleries and service spaces, a completely

novel architectural scheme and structure - in fact a totally new building - had to be introduced.

From the time of their entry for the first stage of the architectural competition in November 1994, the Swiss architects Herzog & de Meuron intelligently denied this 'empty' condition of the building. Even more, they wittily exploited it. They actually made everyone believe that there was an original industrial structure that could be brought into play. In their first design scheme of 1994, the architects write that '[t]he architectural concept for the conversion of the Power Station is radically simple, economical and almost self evident. It takes the maximum profit from the existing building structure. It really deals with the existing volume and with the existing materials'. But upon closer inspection, their scheme merely safeguards the original spatial zoning and massing of the building: '[t]he volume of Boiler House will [...] be very densely filled up with spaces of very different functions, forms and sizes. This density will be opposed to the void of the Turbine Hall'. Of all the participating teams in the first stage of the competition, only Herzog & de Meuron preserve the space of the Turbine Hall in its totality.³³ Their plan is to convert it into an 'entrance hall whose generous space reminds [them] of urban passages'. While the brief for the first stage of the architecture competition does not specify whether the space of the Turbine Hall is to be used for proper museum purposes - it leaves it open to the architects to preserve the space for a second phase in the building campaign, although 'it might be used as an open unfinished space in the interim' - Herzog & de Meuron immediately do.³⁴ They define it both as public vestibule *and* display space: '[the] Turbine Hall [is] not only spectacular because of its bold industrial appearance and because of its logistical advantages for orientation and access to all internal areas: it will also be a wonderful exhibition space for temporary and special installations, whose dimensions are beyond the possibilities of the display spaces in the Boiler House'.³⁵ The architect's

suggestion is the object of 'substantial enthusiasm' by the jury and serves as one of the main factors for the 'unanimous decision to shortlist [the architects] for Stage 2'.³⁶ In their design for the second stage in January 1995, Herzog & de Meuron follow the same general line. While on the one hand they portray the Turbine Hall as 'one of London's most powerful new public spaces', they once again stress the necessity of the strategy to leave its 'industrial appearance [...] untouched': it allows visitors to experience 'the spatial power of Turbine Hall [...] at its apex'. The Turbine Hall will function as 'the building's centre of gravity' and the starting point for all further visits. But far more important is the architect's detailed description of the encounter with specific artworks in the Turbine Hall. After having entered the museum from the North entrance and standing on the platform in the middle of the Turbine Hall, the reader is addressed as a future visitor and invited to descend into the Turbine Hall and look at the artworks: 'Perhaps you would like to see some of the temporary art installations in Turbine Hall from less of a distance. You could take the escalator moving down a few metres into Turbine Hall and land squarely in front of Rachel Whiteread's *House* or Dan Graham's *Cinema*'. This first encounter, so they suggest, serves as an attractive pretext for further exploration of the museum galleries: 'Did that inspire you to see more contemporary art or had you always wanted to see the Rothko paintings in their new space here at Bankside. You can take one of the lifts, so close at hand, and arrive at any suite you like'.³⁷ The accompanying perspective drawing of the Turbine Hall immediately became, as Cynthia Davidson remarked, 'the seminal image from the competition'.³⁸ While the drawing proficiently communicated the strategic simplicity of the winning design, it above all promised a friendly encounter between art and architecture in the vast space of the Turbine Hall. But upon closer inspection, it achieves the latter in a particularly intriguing if not outright misleading manner. While it is Whiteread's 'House' of 1993 that is both mentioned in the text

and drawn on the architect's plans, it is the work 'Ghost' of 1990 that actually figures in the drawing. It is not that the architects used two different works, but their difference in size that matters. 'Ghost' is the plaster cast of the interior of one room, whereas 'House' is the cast of an entire house. In Herzog & de Meuron's perspective, 'Ghost' is thus far bigger than in reality - one only needs to keep the 23m width of the Hall in mind. It is, in other words, blown up to the size of 'House' to 'fit' the Turbine Hall, whereas the actual 'Ghost' would look minute in it. Although this perspectival gesture might be a simple ploy of the architects, it is significantly misleading and prophetic at the same time. While it skilfully masks the fate of all the artworks that will later be put on display in the space, it first and foremost foretells the formal strategy that will haunt the artworks to be commissioned for the space: inflation.

In Herzog & de Meuron's final design, tension between the old building and the newly inserted architecture is largely absent. The only relics of the former Power Station are the original gantry cranes that have been retained in the Turbine Hall, to be used in moving works of art and to carry a flexible lighting system. Neither the industrial character nor the beloved patina of the former structure surface in the exhibition spaces. They are, one after the other, refined white cubes. The 'purpose-built museum' that the Tate so consciously wanted to avoid is skilfully shoved into an old brick crust. The bay next to the entrance hall has been neatly filled up right up to the ridge with five floors of gallery spaces, and the new steel frame, which supports the whole structure, is situated exactly behind the existing steel columns. It is not clear where the new architecture starts, where the existing building ends, or where the two meet; Herzog & de Meuron blend them together almost seamlessly. At the opening of Tate Modern, Serota noted that Herzog & de Meuron created, ultimately, 'completely new, architect-designed exhibition spaces'.³⁹ The Turbine Hall is the only place where the so-called art-friendly character of the industrial

structure actually appears, and this is paradoxically the space in which the representational aspect and spectacular nature of the architecture of many new museums is at its best. But even more absurd is that precisely the type of space that was supposed to make the artists feel at ease and stimulate them to get to work, is blown up to such dimensions that it no longer corresponds to a regular working space. Ultimately the choice to leave the central core of the building empty caused the very heart of the museum, as Tate curator Catherine Wood rightly commented, 'to become a huge container that holds nothing: a void'.⁴⁰

Herzog & de Meuron's choice for a very plain finishing of the space, only amplified the void status of the space. On the ground, the architects provided a grey, polished floor. They restored the steelwork and painted it dark charcoal grey. They repaired the brickwork on the Switch House wall to the South and painted it grey as well. The solid bridge that breaks the Hall in two and connects the North entrance with the future South entrance, is painted black, as well as the stairs descending to the ground floor. The only bright elements are four light-box windows that overlook the Turbine Hall from the new gallery levels to the north. These provide artificial light for the Turbine Hall, indicate separate levels, and afford views both over the Hall and from the Hall into the gallery levels. In this 'grey universe', as a journalist once described it, seven artists were about to install their 'biggest work ever'.⁴¹

A voyage to the Land of Lilliput

At the Place where the Carriage stopped, there stood an ancient Temple, esteemed to be the largest in the whole Kingdom; which having been polluted some Years before by an unnatural Murder, was, according to the Zeal of those People, looked upon as Profane, and therefore had been applied to common Uses, and all the Ornaments and Furniture carried away. In this Edifice it was determined I should lodge. The Great Gate fronting to the North



Fig. 1: Roman Ondák, 'It Will All Turnout Right in the End', 2005–2006 (Installation, mixed media; Overall dimensions 3,6 x 2,5 x 15,8 m), Installation view, Tate Modern, London, 2006. Courtesy the artist, Gallery Martin Janda and gb agency, Paris. © Roman Ondák.

was about four Foot high, and almost two Foot wide, through which I could easily creep. On each Side of the Gate was a small Window not above six Inches from the Ground [...] being fixed within four Inches of the Gate, allowed me to creep in, and lie at my full Length in the Temple.

Capt. Gulliver, 'Gulliver's Travels. A Voyage to Lilliput', 1727.⁴²

In the summer of 2006, the artist Roman Ondák installed 'It Will All Turnout Right in the End' in the Level 2 Gallery, a small gallery at ground level next to the North Entrance of Tate Modern. Invited as the last artist to participate in the 'Untitled Series' - a series of small commissioned shows of young and emerging artists, or the junior-Unilever Series so to speak - Ondák filled the space of the gallery with a meticulously reconstructed scale model of the Turbine Hall. He shrank the Turbine Hall to the size of the Level 2 Gallery, reducing it to about a tenth of its size.⁴³ At first sight, Ondák's miniature version of the Turbine Hall did not reveal much about the space. The space looked exactly the same, only smaller. The work nevertheless performed a significant double reversal. Firstly, while most if not all of the artists within 'The Unilever Series' scaled up their works to the vast size of the Turbine Hall, Ondák's work scaled the Turbine Hall down to the customary size of a gallery. And secondly, it did literally the opposite of what the Turbine Hall and most of the works in 'The Unilever Series' have been accused of. Ondák's miniaturised version of the Turbine Hall did not 'dwarf' the visitor, nor, as James Meyer remarked on Kapoor's 'Marsyas', 'reduce the viewer to a Lilliputian stature'; it made the latter too big. Through the artist's deadpan twist, the viewer got to play the character that makes the Lilliputians appear so minute: that of Gulliver, the world traveller.⁴⁴

Ondák, however, was not the only artist to make a scale model of the Turbine Hall – despite being the only one to present it as a work in itself. During the

preparations of their Unilever commission, Kapoor, Eliasson and Whiteread made one or several scale models of the Turbine Hall, as pictures in their respective catalogues confirm. Kapoor made several rather table-sized replicas to test out different shapes and sizes of the vellum. Whiteread made a model to try out different forms and piles of the resin boxes. Eliasson, in turn, made a medium-sized version of the Turbine Hall in his studio in Berlin to test out the mirrors, sunlight and smoke in preparation of 'The Weather Project'. Four pages with pictures at the end of Eliasson's catalogue document these tests. While some present close-up views of the model with fluffy clouds of smoke or with different versions of the radiant sun, others show Eliasson and his assistants using the model. Two pictures in particular are quite striking. The first shows an interior view of the model with a tiny white plastic figure, the other depicts a standing person who neatly fits into the model by bowing his head. These pictures actually disclose the two dominant relations towards the space that so far have been manifest in the occupation of the Turbine Hall and the attempt to cope with its size: the minuscule and the overscaled, either Lilliputian or Gulliver; the former position being the one the viewer is forced to take up, and the latter taken up by most, if not all of the art installations.

The amusing play on the antagonism between Gulliver and Lilliputian, giant and dwarf, or gigantic and miniature in both Ondák's and Eliasson's model of the Turbine Hall on the one hand, and the peculiar resemblance between all the models and the actual space on the other, point at one of the most essential qualities of the actual space: its gigantism. In the book 'On Longing', Susan Stewart points out that the gigantic and the miniature, although oppositional at first, depart from a same distorted relationship to reality: '[b]oth involve the selection of elements that will be transformed and displayed in an exaggerated relation to the social construction of reality'. The exaggeration however takes on a different

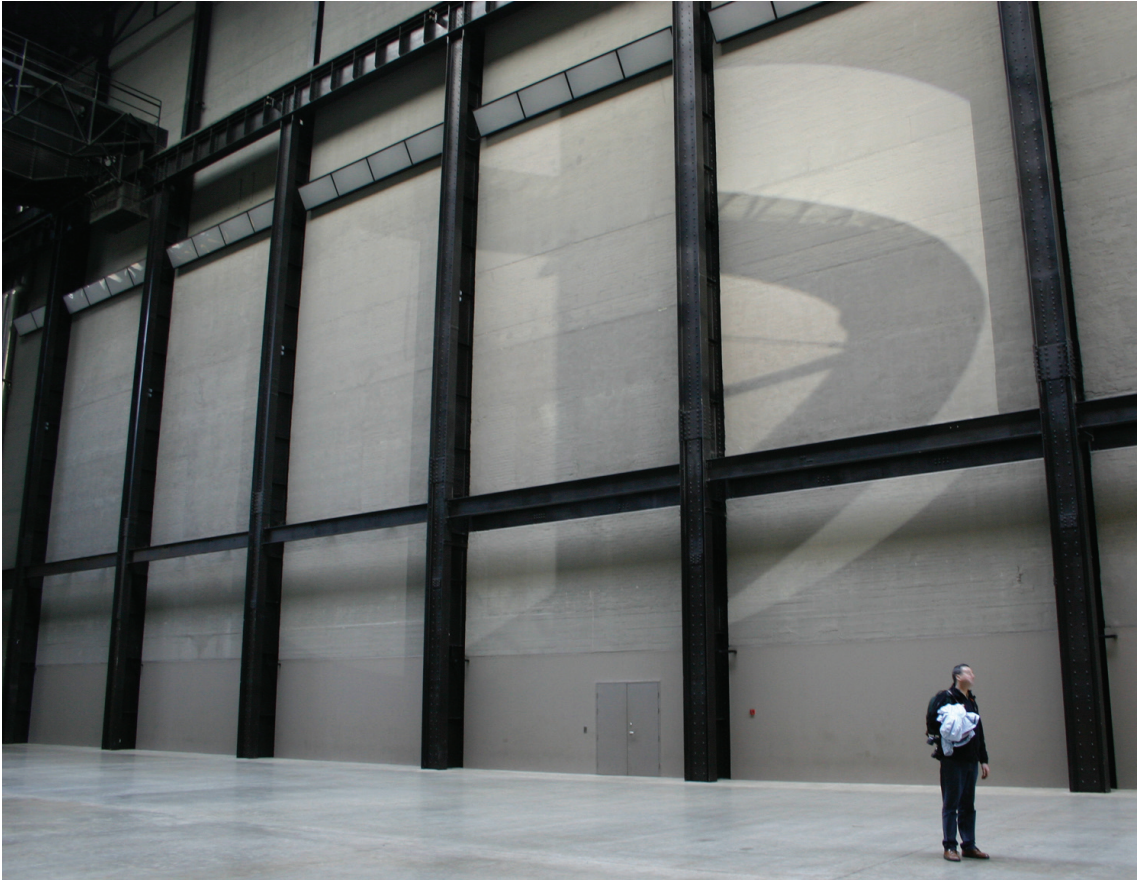


Fig. 2: Turbine Hall, Tate Modern, London. View during Carsten Höller's 'Test Site', December 2006. Photograph by Jean-Pierre Le Blanc. © Jean-Pierre Le Blanc.

form: 'while the miniature represents a mental world of proportion, control, and balance, the gigantic represents a physical world of disorder and disproportion'. The most typical miniature world, according to Stewart, is the domestic model of the dollhouse, while the most typical gigantic world is the 'vast, undifferentiated space of the sky'.⁴⁵ Despite their difference in size, both the miniature and the gigantic however are comparably difficult to portray: 'The literary description of the gigantic involves the same problems of detail and comparison as that of the miniature, but whereas description of the miniature approaches an infinity of relevant detail, description of the gigantic frequently focuses on movement and its attendant consequences'.⁴⁶

This simultaneous likeness and difference in describing the miniature and the gigantic is at work in Ondák's model of the Turbine Hall in a significant manner. In his miniature version of the vestibule of Tate Modern, there is, in fact, not much 'infinity of relevant detail' to be discerned. The faithful reconstruction is marked by a similar lack of material density in the real space. In the model, the space appears as bland, undifferentiated and 'featureless' as in reality. The actual Turbine Hall holds neither the kind nor the amount of detail that can be shrunk in order to produce the later density of a miniature. As such, Ondák's model 'reveals' that the Turbine Hall is not so much a literally big space as it is a gigantic one. It demonstrates that the Turbine Hall's gigantic nature is not so much a matter of actual dimensions, but of how its size actually takes shape. It is the direct product of the ineffable material constitution, abstract character and bland appearance of the vestibule. Even when miniaturized to the tiniest detail, the space retains all the aspects of the gigantic. And this applies to the preparatory models of the other artists too, but then in a reverse sense. Despite their differences in degrees of abstraction, they all come remarkably close to reality. Even Kapoor's schematic model which resulted from his 'diagrammatic' approach

of the space - 'imagining the space as a box with a shelf in it' - shows little difference to the actual Turbine Hall.⁴⁷ The same goes for Whiteread's and Eliasson's models. They look astonishingly similar to the real Turbine Hall.

If we return, finally, to 'The Unilever Series' and the different installations, it becomes manifest that precisely this gigantism of the Turbine Hall presents the critical challenge. Since it makes the architecture of the space into both a difficult target and a difficult source. The gigantic constitution of the space defies the long-established strategies of site specificity and by extension, institutional critique. The space apparently lacks those architectural elements - windows, doors, stairs, thresholds, etc - that have traditionally been seized upon to 'reveal' the particularity and contingency of the architectural and institutional 'framework'. And if they are present, they simply vanish in the vapid space of the Turbine Hall. In addition, the space most shrewdly secretes its own history. Those few elements that recall the industrial past of the building have either received an insipid finishing or smoothly blend with the new architecture. The industrial architecture of Tate Modern does not constitute a historically resonating context, but an aesthetically pleasing background. The result is a site that appears to be devoid of specifics, a context that seems to confront the artists with the critical impossibility to draw something 'specific' from it. It is as though there are no stories to unravel, no details to amplify, no hidden or back spaces to disclose, no hidden mechanisms to expose, no institutional regimes to divulge in the Turbine Hall. The only 'thing' the Turbine Hall has to offer, as it were, is a vast and empty space: a void. But the Turbine Hall's nullity is undeniably its most important, if not its most 'specific' quality. Hence if there is one aspect that demands further scrutiny within the upcoming editions of 'The Unilever Series' - and we have yet another five to go - it is whether there is more to this void than to be filled.

Notes

1. Robert Smithson and Allan Kaprow, 'What Is a Museum? A Dialogue between Allan Kaprow and Robert Smithson (1967)', in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, ed. by Jack D. Flam (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), pp. 43-51 (p. 44).
2. Juan Muñoz and James Lingwood, 'A Conversation, May 2001', in *Juan Muñoz. Double Bind at Tate Modern* (London: Tate Publishing, 2001), pp. 67-77 (p. 77).
3. Nicholas Serota, 'A New Landmark', in *Tate Modern: The First Five Years* (London: Tate Publishing, 2005), pp. 5-6 (p. 5).
4. Martin Gayford, 'A New Space for a New Art', in *Tate Modern: The First Five Years* (London: Tate Publishing, 2005), pp. 7-12 (p. 7).
5. Rt. Hon. Chris Smith, 'The Political Impact', in *Tate Modern: The First Five Years* (London: Tate Publishing, 2005), pp. 17-22 (p. 19).
6. The first sponsorship in 1999 consisted of £1.25 million. In 2004, Tate Modern and Unilever renewed the sponsorship contract for another £1 million, granting the institution additional funding for the series to continue until 2008. In July 2007, Unilever extended its sponsorship of 'The Unilever Series' for a further five years, until 2012. The third sponsorship over five years consisted of £2.1 million, which brought Unilever's total support of 'The Unilever Series' to over £4 million. For a critical assessment of Unilever's sponsorship of Tate Modern, see: Chin-tao Wu, *Privatising Culture. Corporate Art Intervention since the 1980s* (London, New York: Verso, 2003)
7. Rowan Moore, 'Architecture in Motion', in *Tate Modern: The First Five Years* (London: Tate Publishing, 2005), pp. 29-32 (p. 30).
8. Juan Muñoz, as quoted in Adrian Searle, 'We are not alone', *The Guardian*, 12 June 2001, p. 13; Anish Kapoor, as quoted in Pierre Saurisse, 'Questions à Anish Kapoor. La peau sculptée', *Beaux Arts Magazine*, 226 (March 2003), p. 40 ; Olafur Eliasson, 'Behind the Scenes: A Round-Table Discussion', in *Olafur Eliasson. The Weather Project*, ed. by Susan May (London: Tate Publishing, 2003), pp. 65-95 (p. 70).
9. Louisa Buck, 'The Mistress of Negative Space', *Art Newspaper*, 14, 163, November (2005), p. 38; Robert Storr, 'Sound Waves. Bruce Nauman in conversation with Robert Storr', *Tate Etc.*, 1, 2 (Autumn 2004), pp. 94-101 (p. 101).
10. Only Anish Kapoor had experience with this kind of large-scale site specific installations. In 1999 he created the work 'Tarantara' for the BALTIC Centre of Contemporary art in Gateshead. Over 50m long and 25m wide, the work filled the shell of the Baltic Flour Mills, before the construction of the new building began.
11. Frances Morres, as cited in Steven Henry Madoff, 'Towers of London. Louise Bourgeois: I Do, I Undo, I Redo, 1999-2000', *Artforum*, 38, 10 (2000), 162-165.
12. Philip Ursprung, 'Machines in the Studio', unpublished paper, presented during the session 'The Fall of the Studio. Reassessing *l'atelier d'artiste* in the Poststudio Era' (Chairs: Wouter Davidts & Kim Paice), College Art Association 95th Annual Conference, New York, 14 February 2007.
13. Rachel Whiteread, as cited in Richard Cork, 'Breaking the ice [Rachel Whiteread at Tate Modern (Special Supplement)]', *Art Review*, 57, October (2005), p. 4.
14. Adrian Searle, 'Silly, yet quite unforgettable', *The Guardian*, 9 October, 2002.
15. I obviously refer here to James Meyer's distinction between literal and functional site in his seminal article 'The Functional Site; or, The Transformation of Site Specificity', in *Space, Site, Intervention. Situating Installation Art*, ed. by Erika Suderburg (Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), pp. 23-37. In her important study on site specificity, Miwon Kwon defines three different paradigms: phenomenological or experiential; social/institutional; and discursive. See: Miwon Kwon, *One Place After Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2002).
16. On its last day, the Tate proudly proclaimed that Eliasson's ambient installation 'had more visitors than Bluewater, the largest shopping complex in the world'. See: Tate Press Release, 'Transforming Tate Modern: A New Museum for 21st Century Britain', London, 25 July 2007, p. 6. 'The Weather Project' also solicited diverse reactions from the public, including extraordi-

- nary social interactions between complete strangers. Most famously during a visit of the American President George Bush to London, anti-war protesters used their bodies to spell out the message 'Bush go home' in the mirrored ceiling. In a hilarious piece in 'The Guardian', Adrian Hardwicke, front house manager at Tate Modern, listed some of the other responses. Hardwicke recalled 'a couple intimately engaged beyond what [one] would normally expect in a public space', a visit of '50 people dressed as Santa Claus', and ultimately, a 'visitor [who] brought in his blow-up canoe and sat there surrounded by strangers pretending to paddle towards the sun'. The seemingly 'ordinary man, middle-aged and reasonably well dressed, [...] packed up and moved after 15 minutes'. Adrian Hardwicke, 'Secret diary of an art gallery attendant', *The Guardian*, 18 March, 2004.
17. Daniel Birnbaum, 'Best of 2003. Olafur Eliasson, The Weather Project (Tate Modern, London)', *Artforum*, December (2003), 124; Claire Bishop, 'But is it Installation Art', *Tate Etc.*, 3 (Spring 2005).
 18. Robert Morris, 'Size Matters', *Critical Inquiry*, 26, 3, Spring (2000), pp. 474-87 (p. 482). Morris presents a merciless analysis of the emergence of large-scale artworks since the 1960s, or what he labels as 'the Wagner effect in art'. Whereas he published the article in precisely the same year that Tate Modern opened and the Unilever Series were launched, he already argues in the most prophetic terms that those museum objects that generate sufficient Wagner effect, 'provide simultaneous phenomenal aesthetic fetishes that are also transcendent and generally nationalist cultural idols, which sometimes dazzle as totemic objects pragmatically guaranteed by massive dollar signs and historical pedigrees - all delivered in the package of a sensational event'.
 19. German painter Anselm Kiefer was the first artist to provide the central nave of the Grand Palais with the installation 'Sternenfall', a series of twelve supersized boxes and a series of towers. Usual suspect Richard Serra and Christian Boltanski are next in line. Serra is definitely the most cherished artist in the global competition between museums. When the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao opened in 1997, it proudly presented Richard Serra's massive sculpture 'Snake' (1996-97) in the museum's 'Fish' Gallery. In 2003, the Dia Center for the Arts opened a new branch in the immense spaces of a former box factory, containing amongst others Serra's impressive 'Torqued Ellipses' (1996-2000). A year later, Serra was again commissioned by the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao for seven new works, resulting in the permanent installation 'The Matter of Time' in the 'Fish' gallery.
 20. Hal Foster, 'Why All the Hoopla', *London Review of Books* (August 2001), reprinted as the chapter 'The Master Builder', in *Design and Crime (and other diatribes)* (London, New York: Verso, 2002), pp. 27-42 (p. 27).
 21. James Meyer, 'No more scale. The experience of size in contemporary sculpture', *Artforum*, 42, 10 (2004), 220-28. For a thoughtful critique on the use of the notion of (the) spectacle by both Meyer and Foster, see: Dan Smith, 'Size Matters', *Art Monthly*, 282 (2004-05), pp. 1-4.
 22. James Meyer, 'No more scale', pp. 222-23.
 23. Ibid. p. 228.
 24. Tay Kheng Soon, 'Problem of scale in architecture', *Indian Institute of Architects Journal*, 58, 1 (1993), pp. 5-7; 9-10.
 25. In the article 'The Scale of Man' - quite surprisingly listed as 'The Space of Man' in the Table of Contents - in the May 1970 issue of 'Arts Magazine', art critic Gregoire Müller explores the then-recent growing in size of artworks by such artists as Richard Serra, Claes Oldenburg, Michael Heizer and Walter De Maria. Müller situates the tendency to produce large-scale artworks within the ambition of contemporary art to 'make more evident and to contest unconscious systems which direct visual perception' and to this end, the resulting artworks are 'the first to attempt to unsettle one of the oldest and most solid notions - that of the human body as the point of reference for all measure'. And precisely at this point Müller also situates the inability to deal with these kind of gigantic works: they are assessed 'solely relative to architectural space'. The problem, Müller pointedly states, goes 'beyond the conflict with

- architecture (...) [and] is more general and essential'. Gregoire Müller, 'The Space of man / The Scale of Man', *Arts Magazine*, 44, 7 / May (1970), pp. 42-43.
26. Daniel Buren, Olafur Eliasson and Tim Griffin, 'In Conversation: Daniel Buren & Olafur Eliasson', *Artforum*, 43, 9 (2005), 208-14 (p. 211).
27. Jessica Morgan, 'Turbine Höller', in *Carsten Höller. Test Site*, ed. by Jessica Morgan (London: Tate Publishing, 2006), pp. 11-18 (p. 12).
28. Jacques Herzog and Dietmar Steiner, 'Tate Modern, London', *Domus*, 828 (2000), pp. 32-44 (p. 40).
29. For a more extensive analysis of Tate Modern's reconversion strategy, see: Wouter Davidts, 'Art Factories. Museums of Contemporary Art and the Promise of Artistic Production', *Fabrications, The journal of the Society of Architectural Historians, Australia and New Zealand*, 16, 1 (2006), 23-42.
30. Although the decision to use the Bankside building had already been taken, the Tate eagerly grasped at the results of the questionnaire not only to legitimatise the choice of an existing building, but also to underpin the scheme ideologically. See Nicholas Serota, as cited in Daniel Birnbaum, 'Tate Show. Daniel Birnbaum on Tate Modern', *Artforum*, 38, 8 (2000), 39.
31. Cynthia C. Davidson, 'An interview with Nicholas Serota and Richard Burdett', *Any*, 13 (1996), 21-58 (pp. 43;46).
32. *Ibid.* p. 46.
33. The other architects that were shortlisted for the first stage of the architecture competition were Alsop & Störmer (UK), Arata Isozaki & Associates (Japan), David Chipperfield Architects (UK), Future Systems (UK), Michael Hopkins and Partners (UK), Nicholas Grimshaw and Partners (UK), Office for Metropolitan Architecture (The Netherlands), Rafael Moneo (Spain), Renzo Piano Building Workshop (Italy), Rick Mather Architects (UK), Rolfe Judd & Claude Silvestrin (UK) and Tadao Ando Architect & Associates (Japan). The architects that were shortlisted for the second stage, were Chipperfield, O.M.A., Renzo Piano and Tadao Ando. For an overview of the designs in the different stages of the competition, see amongst others *Tate Gallery of Modern Art. Selecting an Architect* (Exhibition Catalogue), ed. by Rowan Moore and Sharon Gethings (London: Tate Gallery / Blueprint, 1995); *Building Tate Modern. Herzog & De Meuron Transforming Giles Gilbert Scott*, ed. by Rowan Moore and Raymund Ryan (London: Tate Gallery, 2000) and the theme issue on Tate Modern by the magazine *Any*, 13, 1996.
34. 'Tate Gallery of Modern Art. Competition to Select an Architect', London, Tate Gallery of Modern Art, 1994 [Competition brief Stage 1], p. 16.
35. Herzog & De Meuron Architects, 'Tate Gallery of Modern Art. Competition to Select an Architect. Stage 1. Competition Entry Herzog & De Meuron Architects', London, Tate Gallery, Tate Gallery Research Centre, Archives [Architectural Competition; Stage 1], 1994.
36. Victoria Walsh, 'Tate Gallery of Modern Art. Competition to Select an Architect. Stage 1. Minutes from assessor's meeting on 14 & 15 November 1994', London, Tate Gallery, Tate Gallery Research Centre, Archives [Architectural Competition; Stage 1], 1994.
37. Herzog & de Meuron, 'Tate Gallery of Modern Art. Competition to Select an Architect. Stage 2. Competition Entry Herzog & de Meuron', London, Tate Gallery, Tate Gallery Research Centre, Archives [Architectural Competition; Stage 2], 1995.
38. Cynthia C. Davidson and Luis Fernández-Galiano, 'Exquisite Corpse. New York / Madrid', *Any*, 13, 1996, 13-49.
39. 'Conversation. Nicholas Serota, Jacques Herzog, Rowan Moore', in *Building Tate Modern. Herzog & De Meuron Transforming Giles Gilbert Scott*, ed. by Rowan Moore and Raymund Ryan (London: Tate Gallery, 2000), pp. 37-57 (p. 55).
40. Catherine Wood, 'EMBANKMENT', in *Rachel Whiteread. Embankment* (London: Tate Publishing, 2005), pp. 25-33 (p. 32).
41. Anne Picq, 'Bruce Nauman: Grand Oeuvre Sonore', *Beaux Arts Magazine*, 247 (2004-2005), p. 43.
42. Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver's Travels*, ed. by Robert Demaria Jr. (London: Penguin Books, 2001), p. 29.
43. Whereas the Turbine Hall measures about 155mx23mx35m, Ondák's rescaled version was approximately 15mx2.5m3.6m (length, width, height).
44. Whereas Ondák reduced the Turbine Hall to about a

tenth of its size, the difference in size between the Lilliputians and Gulliver is 1/12.

45. Susan Stewart, *On Longing. Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), p. 74

46. Ibid. p. 86.

47. Anish Kapoor in 'A Conversation. Anish Kapoor with Donna De Salvo (June 2002)', in *Anish Kapoor, Marsyas* (London: Tate Publishing, 2002), pp. 60-64 (p. 60).

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