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## Meteorologica

### Susan May

'Nothing you see on this show is fake; it's merely controlled'<sup>1</sup>

## I

During the denouement of *The Truman Show*, the eponymous hero struggles to flee the fictitious Seahaven Island, the sole realm of his existence. The desperate efforts of Truman, star of the ultimate reality-television show, to learn more about the world outside incur the wrath of the show's omnipotent producer, and as he finally attempts to sail away, his reckless creator unleashes 'The Weather Programme'. Through a facsimile of the sun rising in the middle of the night to serve as a searchlight, and a torrent of rain, thunder and lightning engineered to deluge the protagonist, the weather becomes the supreme weapon of containment.

The weather has been utilised for both hostile and utopian purposes throughout history. Entire civilisations have collapsed or prospered depending on their ability to predict and adapt to climate change,<sup>2</sup> and battles have been decided on the basis of accurate weather predictions as far back as Marathon in 490 BC.<sup>3</sup> Attempts to control or modify the weather have had a chequered history. The discovery by scientists in the 1940s that sprinkling pure silver iodine into clouds would demonstrably boost the resultant precipitation led the US government to employ the controversial practice of 'cloud seeding' in military campaigns, most notably during the Vietnam War.<sup>4</sup> More recently, cosmonauts on the Mir space station installed a twenty-five metre wide mirror on the side of the craft to catch the rays of the sun. This produced a beam of light that was reflected towards northern Russia, producing a path of sunshine covering over two miles for a period of six minutes as Mir passed overhead.<sup>5</sup> In this era of technological advancement, such attempts at controlling the weather underline mankind's fundamental, and often futile, compulsion to understand and harness the forces of nature.

Aristotle's *Meteorologica*, written around 350 BC, first outlined the philosophy of 'meteorology', so called because it was concerned with anything that fell from, or was suspended in, the sky.<sup>6</sup> In this treatise, the knowledge of atmospheric phenomena was consigned to four primary bodies: fire, air, water, earth. Despite the fact that most of Aristotle's observations were erroneous, his work remained influential for almost two thousand years. However, it was not until the end of the sixteenth century that

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<sup>1</sup> Marlon (played by Noah Emmerich), the best friend of Truman (played by Jim Carrey), in *The Truman Show*, Paramount Pictures, directed by Peter Weir (1998). (Eliasson cites this as one of his favourite films.)

<sup>2</sup> Paul Simons, *Weird Weather, City?* 1997, p.296.

<sup>3</sup> See W.H. Phillips, *War and Weather*, ?city 1944. A more recent example of the weather's influence on warfare is provided by the recent war in Iraq, where diplomatic efforts to secure a peaceful solution without resorting to war failed prematurely in the face of a determination to invade before the heat of summer intensified.

<sup>4</sup> John Lynch, *Wild Weather, city?*, p.210

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p.213. These experiments were abandoned when Mir burned up upon its return to earth.

<sup>6</sup> From the Greek *meteoron*, literally something raised up.

meteorology started to gain legitimacy as a natural science. The invention of instruments designed to measure the properties of the atmosphere (temperature, moisture, air pressure) enabled scholars to categorise and predict changes in the weather.<sup>7</sup> Mysterious phenomena such as rainbows, long held as signs from God, were decoded by mathematicians using simple geometric calculations.<sup>8</sup>

By the beginning of the nineteenth century, meteorology had become an increasingly valid and popular branch of science. In 1803, the English naturalist and amateur meteorologist Luke Howard was the first to identify and classify scientifically the different types of cloud formations and to predict an outcome signified by their form and structure. The systematisation of observable phenomena meant that rather than relying on geologists' detailed and complex atmospheric measurements, anyone could comprehend the processes of nature.<sup>9</sup> Ranked in four basic groups – stratus ('spread' for sheets of clouds), cumulus ('heap' for fluffy clouds), cirrus ('curl' for wispy clouds) and nimbus (for rain clouds) – Howard's taxonomy struck a chord with the German Romantic artist and scholar Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. Inspired by the naturalist's system, Goethe urged others to adopt a more scientific approach in their studies of nature, a notion that was unacceptable to some artists such as Caspar David Friedrich, whose work ventured to embody the spirit of pure essence, and not what he saw as abstract, fixed concepts of nature.<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, the effects of Howard's analysis would later be seen in the work of J.M.W. Turner and John Constable. In particular, Turner's study of Goethe's colour theory and Howard's classifications, embodied in depictions of furious rainstorms and dazzling manifestations of sunlight, produced some of the most extraordinary meteorological studies of the day.<sup>11</sup>

## II

The constituent elements of the weather – water, light, temperature, pressure – are the materials that Olafur Eliasson has deployed throughout his career. His works harness the precarious and evanescent aspects of nature – the fugacity of rainbows or the delicacy of mist – which initially appear redolent of the spiritual and emotional sensibilities of Romanticism. Yet the implication of transcendent experience at the core of the tradition is disrupted in his work by a deliberate exposure of the apparatus delivering this phenomenal matter. The clear evidence of pumps, piping and lamps purposely draws attention to a crucial aspect of Eliasson's practice. By making us conscious of the construction so that we perceive the staging behind the representation, he also makes us conscious of the act of perception, of being caught in the moment of awareness. He notes:

our ability to see ourselves seeing – or to see ourselves in the third person, or actually to step out of ourselves and see the whole set-up with the artefact, the subject and the object – that particular quality also gives us the ability to criticise ourselves ... [and gives] the subject a critical position, or the ability to criticise one's own position in this perspective.<sup>12</sup>

The phenomenological approach of 'stepping out' in order to 'see ourselves seeing' echoes the theories of the French philosopher Maurice Merleau Ponty. He asserted that in order fully to understand the nature of perception, we must step back from it so that we no longer view objects in the world through the lens of perception but make

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<sup>7</sup> In 1450 Cardinal Nicholas de Cusa invented the hygrometer, designed to measure air moisture. In 1593 Galileo Galilei invented the thermometer; his pupil Evangelista Torricelli invented the barometer.

<sup>8</sup> Rene Descartes, *Discours de la methode pour bien conduire sa raison et chercher la verité dans les sciences*, (appendix Les Météores), 1637.

<sup>9</sup> Luke Howard, *On the Modification of Clouds*, 3rd ed., London 1865.

<sup>10</sup> Werner Busch, 'Empirical Studies of Nature', in *The Romantic Spirit in German Art*, London 1994, pp.278–82.

<sup>11</sup> See Jonathan Crary, in *JMW Turner: The Sun is God*, exh. cat. Tate Liverpool 2000.

<sup>12</sup> 'Daniel Birnbaum in conversation with Olafur Eliasson', in *Olafur Eliasson*, London 2002, p.10.

perception itself an object of consciousness.<sup>13</sup>

Merleau-Ponty's writings, along with those of Edmund Husserl, have clearly informed Eliasson's thinking, particularly in the consideration of the centrality of the body in the construction of the spatial and temporal world in which it is located: 'my body is the fabric into which all objects are woven, and it is, at least in relation to the perceived world, the general instrument of my "comprehension"'.<sup>14</sup> The primacy of the viewer's body, along with his or her perception, position and orientation, has long maintained a critical role in Eliasson's work. Altering spatial conditions enables the artist to play with ideas of reality, truth and representation, and encourages viewers to question their sense of their surroundings. Wind streaming through an interior space or rain showers falling inside a gallery accord moments of suspension between the expectation of experience and the authentic encounter. It is the interstice between the instinctual action of perception and the logic of comprehension that fascinates Eliasson. Experience is rendered both physiological and psychological in his works through an accentuation of the gap between the rational expectation of an occurrence and its correlation with the visceral experience of it.

Perception is generally regarded as the reflex detection of truth or reality, an assimilation of pre-existing and new information in order to make sense of one's physical surroundings. Yet reality is contingent on the perceiver; it is not a fixed entity but a construct of our psyche, which is then projected back to the world through patterns of conduct and exchange with our surroundings. As neuroscientist Leif Finkel has noted, 'much of the consistency and logic of external events is, consequently, a property of the "perceiver" rather than the perceived object. Our view of the world may be more subjective than we realise, even beyond any cultural conventions.'<sup>15</sup> Eliasson acknowledges this by making the percipient subject the object of the work. His works challenge presuppositions of our surroundings by creating situations that require viewers to reorder their perception of the environment and their place within it. This is evident in *Green River*, an intervention/site-specific performance that he has presented in a number of cities, most notably in Stockholm in 2000. The artist emptied a container of uranine, a non-toxic substance ordinarily used by marine biologists, into the Norrström River running through central Stockholm. Upon contact with the water, the substance turned a luminous green colour, and as the shimmering river continued to flow through the city, its inhabitants were caused to stop in their tracks and reassess an element of their everyday environment. Unannounced and unpublicised, the project momentarily transformed part of the landscape, redirecting the city's attention to the almost heightened reality of the river. In *Your Sun Machine* (1997), shown in Los Angeles, the spectator's relationship to the object was considered. Viewers were confronted by an ostensibly empty space, the roof of which was punctured with a large circular hole. Each morning, sunlight streamed into the space through this aperture, creating an initially elliptical, then circular outline on the walls and floor of the space. As the day progressed, the beam of light shifted across the room, seemingly appointed as the object of the work. And yet, the viewer, in the position of looking at the 'sun' moving across the room, is reminded of his or her own position as an object located on earth, spinning through space around the real sun.

The oscillation between subject and object, and between perceiver and perceived, was further underlined in the assignment of the possessive pronoun in the title of the piece,

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<sup>13</sup> Merleau-Ponty addressed what psychologists call the 'experience error'. When analysing a perceived object, we substitute it for our consciousness of it; so by attempting to construct perception based on things perceived, we fail to recognise that things perceived are in themselves only accessible through perception: 'We are caught up in the world and we do not succeed in extricating ourselves from it in order to achieve consciousness of the world. If we did we should see that the quality is never experienced immediately and that all consciousness is consciousness of something.' In Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, London 1961 (2000), p.5.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p.235.

<sup>15</sup> Leif Finkel, 'The Construction of Perception', in *Incorporations* (ed. Jonathan Crary and Sanford Kwinter), ? city 1992, p.393.

an approach that Eliasson has adopted in numerous instances. For without the viewer and their subjectivity, the works are vacated.

Eliasson describes his works as ‘phenomena-producers’.<sup>16</sup> Often these devices generate replicas of nature. In an early work *Beauty* (1993), using the most economical of technical means – hosepipe, water and light – a shimmering rainbow emerged from the gloom of an industrial warehouse. The laws of refraction and the viewer’s position governed the visibility of the piece; and as in nature, that also meant that no matter how close they might stand together, no two spectators would ever see the same rainbow. For Eliasson, it was at this point that he fully recognised the centrality of the viewer in the completion of his work: ‘if the light doesn’t go into your eyes, there’s no rainbow.’<sup>17</sup> Artificial rain appears again in *Your strange uncertainty still kept* (1996), in which a curtain of water droplets pounds unremittingly into a shallow tray within a darkened space. A stroboscopic light pulsating over the water freeze-frames the drops as they descend, producing a hypnotic choreography of nature. The arresting image of glittering pearls of rain slowly tumbling to earth also collapses the temporal characteristics of the phenomena, elucidating and intensifying the viewer’s sense of seeing.

An emphasis on the viewer’s passage through or across space persists within Eliasson’s work. By interrupting steady and unconscious movement with unexpected topography, he engenders a heightened awareness of the body’s actions. *Lavafloor* (2002) presented a new terrain within the gallery space, filled with several tons of igneous rocks imported from Iceland, across which visitors had to make a tentative journey to reach the other side. Each step became more precarious than the last, as the vulcanised matter crunched underfoot. The hollow splintering of the lava, feeling oddly exotic and unfamiliar, triggered a physical response, destabilising the body’s equilibrium. *Lavafloor* was formally evocative of Walter de Maria’s *Earth Room*, but stipulated the viewer’s participation in the form of navigation through the space. Similarly, the peculiar and precarious sensation of walking across ice was laid bare in *The Very Large Ice floor* (1998), in which a huge expanse of ice was installed on the ground floor of Oscar Niemeyer’s modernist Bienal Foundation pavilion in São Paulo. The ice, produced through a method normally used for external skating rinks, abutted the window of the pavilion and then extended beyond, presenting dual contexts in which the piece would be encountered: the controlled (cultural) zone of the gallery situation or the unmonitored (natural) realm of the park environment. The pavilion’s huge windows looking onto Ibirapuera Park, a favourite haunt of skateboarders and rollerblade enthusiasts, functioned as the threshold between two settings. The apparent variance between the dynamic movement of the skaters outside and the more uncontrolled and apprehensive migration of the visitors inside merged in the anomalous experience of encountering a floor of ice in a sub-tropical climate.

A number of Eliasson’s installations look at how the eye reads colour, and the concomitant responses elicited by particular uses of colour. *Room for one colour* (1998) deploys yellow low-sodium bulbs, which alter the appearance of all other colours in the vicinity. *Your blue afterimage exposed* and *Your orange afterimage exposed* (both 2000) are comprised respectively of squares of intense blue and orange light projected onto a wall. After several seconds the light suddenly disappears, to be replaced by the complementary image ‘projected’ from the viewer’s retina back to the wall. The concept of ‘completing’ a work within the eye of the beholder also occurs in *Your Double Lighthouse Projection* (2002).

Faced with two circular rooms of different sizes, viewers are initially invited to enter the larger space incorporating hundreds of red, blue and green fluorescent tubes encased

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<sup>16</sup> ‘Daniel Birnbaum in conversation with Olafur Eliasson’, op. cit., p.14.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p.22.

behind a seamless translucent wall. The colour of the illuminated enclosure, flooding the perceptual field, gradually changes through a random spectrum, from pink to blue to orange and so on. At each point, the retinal afterimage mixes with the colours perceived before the eye, until it becomes impossible to differentiate between the two. The adjacent room, lit simply with white light, provides viewers with the opportunity to refresh their visual faculties. Always in a state of flux, the work constantly communicates new experience and meaning.

### III

The extent to which experience can be mediated or manipulated, predominantly within the paradigm of the museum, is a theme to which Eliasson continually returns. Within the realms of presentation, he regards the refusal of institutions to reveal the ideology behind the construct as an abdication of responsibility. He accordingly examines the degree to which reality is objectified within this context and adopts strategies that remind the visitor of the various representational levels that are in operation at any given time.<sup>18</sup> He strives to demonstrate that the 'reality' of the museum and its artefacts is no more genuine than the act of rain falling inside a room. Both are representations, and for Eliasson when a system does not attempt to deceive by illusion but is made transparent, experience itself becomes more authentic. Revealing the methods of mediation – from the display of art to its interpretation and promotion – enables the viewer to see the machinery of the institution and thus distinguish its multiple values, which the artist regards as the social and moral possibility of the museum.<sup>19</sup>

This position was the starting point for The Weather Project. The process of developing the work commenced with a discussion between Eliasson and the individuals professionally concerned with the evolution of Tate Modern: from the architect and director to members of the education and marketing teams. The discourse focused on various means of spatial, artistic, educational and promotional presentation, and exemplified both the intentional and reflexive ways in which those individuals influence and encode the reception of art within the museum. It illustrated the myriad perspectives and attitudes within such an organisation, with all the order and chaos that this brings. In turn, Eliasson came to regard the museum as a 'microcosm of society', a situation that parallels the conditions of the world outside.<sup>20</sup> Whilst there are common objectives and an established hierarchy involved in the functioning of the organisation, it is essentially individuals, not an unspecified, homogeneous authority, who comprise the museum. Just as society embraces an entanglement of experiences, knowledge and idiosyncrasies, the museum's structure must also incorporate heterogeneous viewpoints.

From this point, Eliasson decided to link the radical and intermittently chaotic structure of the museum/society, to another uncontrollable system, that of the weather. It is specifically the socialising potential of the weather, as a subject that shapes the script of everyday life, that holds most interest for the artist. For island nations such as Britain, where the study of the signs and patterns of changing atmospherics was imperative for the survival of sailors and farmers, the weather has consequently played a significant part in the collective consciousness. Even though its prevalence in daily conversation may shift between cultures, it is still a subject that touches everyone. Eliasson sees discussion about the weather – from quotidian exchange to televised forecasts – as overlapping metaphorically with the institution. Both share opposing traits of optimism,

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<sup>18</sup> Of course, this tendency to avoid revealing organising principles is not only specific to the museum, but filters numerous aspects of cultural life, from politics to religion, whilst television, perhaps the greatest mediator of them all, is now transmogrifying into the purveyor of 'reality'.

<sup>19</sup> 'Olafur Eliasson: Beyond Nordic Romanticism', interview with Angela Rosenberg, *Flash Art*, vol.36, no.230, May–June 2003, pp.110–13.

<sup>20</sup> Discussion with author, October 2002.

doubt, speculation, conviction. Both share equivalent organisational systems, subject to capriciousness and mutability.<sup>21</sup> He has talked about the way in which the weather forecast ('our mediated-experience thermostat') can relegate the experience of the weather to a symbolic level. The forecast preordains the nature of atmospheric forces upon the body before it is experienced, so that 'our immediate, tactile sensation of time and space ... is evacuated, replaced by TV and thermostats'.<sup>22</sup> By relocating the phenomenon of the weather from the external environment into the gallery space, where fog drifts around the confines of the museum and cool breezes nip the skin, Eliasson sets the viewer adrift from the refuge of predicted conditions and the mediating force of the forecast.

The contriving influence of the forecast could, Eliasson argues, be regarded as analogous to the various layers of representation within the museum. From commentaries on the meaning of art works to the marketing of an exhibition, multiple systems operate to enable the institution to function. The degree to which these systems are made conspicuous to the audience can vary according to the task and detail; the reason why works of art are juxtaposed in a certain way will be explained, but the ideology behind the interpretation might not be immediately apparent. Certain organising principles are based on tacit but accepted values. Similarly, in the weather forecast a summary of approaching climatic conditions might omit details that the broadcaster regards as superfluous to the fundamental message. Eliasson views this propensity to generalise and to arrive at an interpretation without making the audience aware that it is not the sole 'truth', as misleading. For him, the attempt to present something as 'real' before it has been experienced – whether the moisture of a raindrop on the skin or the emotions elicited by a work of art – is a segregation of the senses. When notions of uncertainty are eradicated and when the representational is deemed a given our ability to see, understand and experience becomes atrophied.

#### IV

The idea of revealing the 'construction behind the construction', the formal device used in much of Eliasson's work, emerged early in the conceptualisation of *The Weather Project*. Eliasson sought ways in which to test the systems of Tate Modern and, in doing so, 'to hold a mirror up to the institution', making it reflect upon itself and in turn, become more transparent to its audience.<sup>23</sup> The viewer's response to the work – his or her experience and perception of it – is the work, in his view. If that response might somehow be influenced through marketing or education, the artist recognised that he must become responsible for those aspects of the project.<sup>24</sup> From this, he developed the plan to work alongside Tate colleagues to examine customary methods of mediation (both deliberate and unintentional) and seek new ways of working within the convention. The proposal to release a press statement conveying the emergence of mysterious meteorological conditions in the Turbine Hall, the location of Eliasson's installation, would test the boundaries of the institution's relationship with the media. Would clearly presenting a fiction as 'truth' effectively consign all further information issued by the institution to the level of invention? (Eliasson would of course argue that this is the case anyway.) Like the weather, the end result could not be entirely predicted: would it generate an unprecedented press response, be completely overlooked, or just be

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<sup>21</sup> 'Forecasting meteorology is one of the last fields in our society that is still considered as objective ... We believe that scientists tell the truth, which is a paradox as they can never tell the truth – it is not a question of subjectivity but of randomness'. Discussion with author, April 2003.

<sup>22</sup> 'The Weather Forecast and Now, 2001', Olafur Eliasson, Phaidon Press, op. cit., p.141. See also Olafur Eliasson, 'Think with me about your extension of now', *Cabinet*, no.3, Summer 2001, p.64.

<sup>23</sup> Discussion with author, November 2002.

<sup>24</sup> Eliasson used the analogy that he would never ask people he did not know to complete a work in his studio, so in order to influence the reception of his work, he must take on the responsibility for its promotion himself. Discussion with author, December 2002.

discounted out of hand? In wrestling with the challenges presented by the proposal, the institution was compelled to appraise thoroughly its conduct and connection to the media and, in turn, to the wider world.

A survey, authored by the artist, was issued to over one hundred members of staff within the museum with questions relating to their perceptions of the weather. Enquiries ranged from the prosaic to the abstract, all linked by an anthropological approach to the subject: 'Do you think the weather impacts on your salary?'; 'In which season do you kiss your partner the most?'; 'Do you think the idea of weather in our society is based on Nature or Culture?'<sup>25</sup> The overwhelming and diverse response provided him with the shortlist of enquiries and statements that would form the basis of the marketing campaign for the exhibition. Posters inscribed with statistical data relating to the weather would enable Eliasson to promote the essence of the show without corrupting the experience of the work itself.

The issue of the commodification of experience is a perennial challenge for the museum. Operating in a climate of dwindling public and private resources, matched by demands for greater audiences, institutions have to control with care the quality of information presented to visitors when attempting to entice them into the gallery. If the experience of art is packaged to the extent that it merely becomes simulacrum, its meaning is rendered static and restricted. Appropriating the brief for the promotion of his work enabled Eliasson to encourage more speculative attitudes towards the project. In an age of image overload, an advertisement bearing the simple question 'Did you talk about the weather today?' can often rouse the somnambulism of the jaded reader more effectively than a representation of the actual artwork.

And in doing so, the haptic experience of the work is left unscathed. The same stratagem applied to the interpretation of Eliasson's work inside the building. Since the establishment of Tate Modern, a policy of providing its audience with clear, concise interpretations of configurations or individual works of art has contributed in some part to the critical and public success of the gallery. Conversely, it might be argued that this approach is too prescriptive, totalising the reading of art into single statements of intent. Presenting the audience with an incongruous, hypothetical interpretation induces the spectator to consider the reliability of other statements, leading to the realisation that all interpretation is representation. Whilst Eliasson stresses that he is not hostile to the interpretation or marketing per se, he maintains that if the museum chooses to stage-manage the perception of the work, it should also find alternative methods by which this stage-management can be revealed to the viewer.

## V

In the spirit of Eliasson's museological evaluations, let me now present you with a representation of The Weather Project located in the Turbine Hall. It instantiates one of numerous potential renderings, framed by my subjectivity. It may correlate with your expectation or even correspond with your experience of the work. But remember: 'reality' is not necessarily a given; it may be dependent on the perceiver.<sup>26</sup> So what follows is a construction shaped by perception [isn't it shaped by expectation, since the work isn't made yet?], matched against my internal representation of the world, merely one representation amongst many.

The Turbine Hall is the architectural centrepiece of Tate Modern. The architects of the museum, Herzog and de Meuron, refer to it as a 'covered street', citing the

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<sup>25</sup> Olafur Eliasson, Tate Weather Monitoring Group, survey, April 2003.

<sup>26</sup> See Francisco J. Varela, 'The Re-enchantment of the Concrete', in *Incorporations*, 1992, pp.320–37, Zone?

extraordinary nineteenth-century arcade of the Galleria Vittorio Emanuele in Milan (date?) as their inspiration. Despite this description, the Turbine Hall is resolutely part of the interior building, a cavernous space that all visitors to the museum encounter, predominantly at the point of entry through the west entrance. Its history as the engine room for the huge turbines generating electricity for Bankside Power Station is recalled by the hum of the small sub-station attached to the rear of the building, which continues to generate electricity for the city. Bankside, now inhabited by Tate Modern, had a relatively short working life, having opened in 1963 after a protracted construction period, and finally ceased operating in 1981. Located in the centre of London, it was inaugurated a decade after the 'Clean Air Act', the bill of Parliament introduced to combat the levels of air pollution following the 'peasoupers' – lethal cocktails of coal smoke and fog – that killed thousands of Londoners in the early 1950s. As a converted oil-powered station, Bankside provided a less polluted source of energy. However, by the 1970s, when the price of oil rocketed following the OPEC crisis, the costeffectiveness of the station dwindled and by the end of the decade, its life as a power station was drawing to an end.

Entering through the west side of the building, it seems that the fog has returned to invade the space. A fine haze saturates the air, shrouding the industrial appearance of the Turbine Hall. The covered street has finally become exposed to the elements, and an external climate has taken occupancy of the building. The sense of exterior space is genuinely prolonged beyond the entrance doors, fulfilling the objective of the building's architects to render the Turbine Hall the 'place to make [the] connection between the outside and the inside'.<sup>27</sup> Just as the body is braced when it detects transference from one set of external conditions to another, it is required to re-adjust to this unfamiliar occurrence within the building. Curiously, the incidence of weather systems developing within large interior structures is not unknown; in architectural and engineering circles it is acknowledged that a light precipitation can sometimes occur in vast constructions, although the visible evidence of such phenomena is often imperceptible. Not so within the Turbine Hall, where the manifestation of the haze seems to amass into more discernible cloud-like formations as one draws closer to the bridge intersecting the space. As moments elapse, the accumulation intensifies, until a visible mass of vapour forms into a hovering cloud.

A glance overhead to see where the cloud might escape jolts the gaze. The ceiling of the hall has disappeared, replaced by a reflection of the mist and clouds below. The firmament is the space replicated, enhancing the sense of verticality within the structure. The process of deciphering the boundaries of the actual room through the miasma is challenged, and the sensation of wandering across the space becomes progressively discombobulating.

The mirrored ceiling draws the eye to the far end of the hall, where a giant semi-circular form hangs, illuminated by hundreds of mono-frequency lights. The arc is repeated in the mirror overhead, producing a perfect sphere of dazzling radiance. While the iconography of the sun continues to draw the viewer forward, linking the real space with the reflection, the intensity of the rays makes the approach increasingly discomforting. As the eyes pulsate, adjusting to the blinding light, the register of colour on the visual cortex is reduced to a duotone range. The wavelength generated by the yellow neon leads the eye to record only colours ranging from yellow to black, transforming the visual field into an extraordinary monochrome landscape.

Through the course of the day, the internal weather system of Tate Modern continues to transmute, catalysed not by atmospheric pressures and cold fronts, but by a timetable governed by the artist. Periods of calm presage the convergence of cumulus clouds,

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<sup>27</sup> Jacques Herzog, 'Conversation', in *Building Tate Modern*, Tate Publishing, 2000, p.38.



gathering momentum. As time flows on, the clouds dissipate, wafting through the space before eventually vanishing from view. The mesmerising display of dematerialisation – from the transformation of the ceiling into a duplicate of space, to the unrelenting evaporation of the clouds – returns the viewer as subject to the centre of the work. When Truman, comprehending that his environment is counterfeit, asks his ‘creator’ if anything in his life was real, he is told without hesitation: ‘You were real’. Eliasson similarly reminds the viewer that the only truly dependable reality comes from within.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> The Truman Show, op. cit.