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35. JOPPA, op. cit.

Imágenes

01. Jardín de la Fundación Ford, Nueva York, del arquitecto paisajista Dan Kiley, 1964. Fotografía de David Leventi, 2013. Cortesía de Rick Wester Fine Art, New York.

02. "Cuadro de mandos medioambiental", diseño de interfaz de N sketch Inc. (Yuki Anezaki y Kohei Tsuji) para Fujitsu. Participante de los premios iF Design Awards 2015.

03. Jardín de la Fundación Ford, Nueva York, del arquitecto paisajista Dan Kiley, 1964. Fotografía de David Leventi, 2013. Cortesía de Rick Wester Fine Art, New York.

04. El Tele-Garden de Ken Goldberg y Joseph Santarromana, University of Southern California y Ars Electronica Museum, Linz, Austria, 1995-2004.

16

The Naturalisation of Architectural Space. Three Critical Positions far from Naturalism

The article analyses three coincident projects, developed at the turn of the century, which delve into the relation between nature and architectural space. In the three cases, the interpretation of nature, understood as a cultural construct, is integrated into the architectural conception and the ideation itself. Under what could be called a 'naturalisation' process, these practices get away from those self-proclaimed sustainable or naturalist, usually of short-term view, recovering some traditions and sharing a critical attitude that allow us to reflect on new ways of visualizing nature and its relation with architecture.



NATURALISATION VERSUS NATURALISM "So what is it that I know? Is it nature? Nature as such has no 'real' essence - no truthful secrets to be revealed. I have not come closer to anything essential other than myself and, besides, isn't nature a cultural state anyway? What I have come to know better is my own relation to so-called nature (i.e., my capacity to orient myself in this particular space), my ability to see and sense and move through the

landscapes around me. Looking at nature, I find nothing... only my own relationship to the spaces, or aspects of my relationship to them. We see nature with cultivated eyes. Again, there is no truthful nature; there is only your and my construct of such. Just by looking at nature, we cultivate it into an imagest.

The American artist Robert Smithson described nature as "simply another fiction of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries". This provocative statement come to say that nature should be understood as a cultural construct that has been different interpretations by human being throughout the stages of history. As can be interpreted in works such as the iconic Spiral Jetty, Smithson tries to leave behind numerous conventions to delve into the relationship between technology and natural forms. The artist emphasizes that nature can not be separated from its own interpretation, showing an interesting framework based on technological changes and their possibilities in its visualization and understanding².

This conception acquires greater relevance if we think that the interpretation of nature has changed substantially during the 20th century. At present, it seems to be shaped by an environmental awareness that has been increasing since the 1970s, reflected in publications such *The Limits to Growth* and the frequent use of terms as 'energy crisis' or 'climate change'. Thus, the vision of nature as something obvious, given, coherent and inexhaustible seems to have diminished. We are in a situation in which global perspectives have progressed considerably in our daily lives, being essential to think about the environmental consequences of our individual actions. In this sense, it seems opportune to ask about how to integrate these themes into our aesthetic conceptions.

If we observe the conception of nature throughout modernity, it has constantly developed the difference between preindustrial and industrial, between nature and the products manufactured by the human being, whether specific to the industry or any built environment. Cases such as the conception of Central Park by Frederick Law Olmsted are paradigmatic. In the text "Public Parks and the Enlargement of Towns" of 1870, Olmsted understands the park as something linked to the nature, as a focus of healthiness (alluding to the social hygiene movement), opposed to the city and the urban environment. This fact is also evidenced in Le Corubusier's urban projects, as Ville Radieuse (1922), where the housing towers spread out on uninterrupted nature. The fifth point for the new architecture also fosters this duality, conceived the garden terrace as return to nature the space occupied by building footprints.

But perhaps the case of the Crystal Palace is more manifest for what the building itself means for the modern conception. In this case, Joseph Paxton had to preserve a row of centenarian elms to achieve the permission, given by aristocratic Hyde Park neighbourhood, to carry out the pavilion for the 1851 London Great Exhibition. Thus, the building, which represents the advances of industrialization, both in the use of new materials (glass and steel) and in its own construction (assembled by an army of railway workers in four months), incorporates the nature that had rejected as an image (**fig. 02**).

The historian and critic Philip Ursprung calls to this attitude, or ideology, "naturalist", "on the assumption that there is actually such a thing as nature on the one hand, and that architecture's meaning resides in its capacity to articulate, frame, enhance and control the forces of nature". Ursprung proposes to leave this duality strengthen in modernity behind; "as the distinction between and wall and ceiling, inside and outside, become more difficult to make, the distinction between what is nature and what is not becomes obsolete". He adds: "nature and all the emblems it used to be represented by are totally absorbed into this new spatial realm"³.

If we pick up Robert Smithson's idea of nature as fiction, either from the notion of integration or from its existence as something independent, then we should reformulate the question of how nature affects and shapes the built environment. And, if we understand nature as an image, text or system of symbols, emerge also the possibility to transform and manipulate. Within this perspective, the idea of 'naturalisation' gets away from a conception of nature as something given or autonomous to the built environment, to assume it as a projection of the human being and consubstantial to the design itself.

The development of architecture from the conception of the nature itself, which lays out a specific visualization of this, is showed a way to explore, especially because the relevance that environmental awareness has acquired in recent decades. On the aesthetic dimensions of this perspective, Iñaki Ábalos points out that "only if there is genuine aesthetic debate, if there is an idea of beauty associated with sustainability, will the latter be able to appeal to architecture in a non-circumstantial way and will encourage architects to work on it". In his "Picturesque Atlas", Ábalos outlines a series of strategies to explore, drawing a narrative on parks and artificial landscapes, what is not known and its transformation into images⁴.

The idea of 'naturalisation' must be placed in this context and understood as a progress from those practices self-proclaimed sustainable or 'naturalist'. The latter seem to have polarized in two opposing strategies: one associated with the strictly technical and another with a kind of expressionism of natural aesthetics. In the first one, the architecture seems to be reduced to mere statistic, justifying any solution from the fulfilment of zero-energy building and to obtain the 'green building' certificate. And, on the other hand, we usually find a literal translation of natural forms, either through a green facade that envelops the building or converting the building directly into landscape. Unlike this view dominated by marketing that has made sustainability its all-purpose word, essentially of shortterm view, the following projects build a critical framework to delve into the relation between nature and architecture.

NATURE AS METAPHOR: RENEW THE MODERN ARCHITECTURAL SPACE "With this simple construction, the Mediatheque will be the archetype of an entirely new architecture. It will serve as a place where the two bodies of the contemporary human being inhabit, the body that contains the flow of electrons and the primitive body responsive to nature".

The Sendai Mediatheque is the result of an international competition that led Toyo Ito to carry out, during 1995 and 2001, one of his most celebrated buildings. Its iconic image, the structural innovation or the programmatic flexibility give to the building an undoubted interest, but we can add the attempt to represent some topics of contemporary culture such as the fluidity condition, the functional multiplicity, the virtually of the limits or the advances of digital technology and electronic media. These topics have also been developed by Ito in various texts and articles in an effort to reflect on the changes of contemporary society.

Despite his awareness about the specificity of architecture recognizing its codes and a certain tradition, Ito considers essential finding in topicality part of the meaning of architecture (its contemporary condition). In order to introduce certain meanings in his work, the use of metaphor is frequent, as the Mediatheque exemplified, finding in the interpretation of nature or natural forms its main starting point. It should be noted that metaphor comes from the Greek term 'metaphora', which comes to say 'translation' or 'transfer', and which is based on the articulation of relationships of one thing with something different from itself to define a field of recognition and association as well as a transmission of certain meaning⁶.

The idea of column as a tree dominates the conception of the Mediatheque; while the building spatial definition seems to be based on the idea of forest, with a oscillation between open and close areas or lightness and darkness, setting up a varied composition **(fig. O3)**. But atmospheric phenomena are also used in order to suggest an atmosphere composed of fluctuating activities; in this case, the information flows replace the natural ones. The diverse activities of each floor are conceived from this information exchange through conventional or micro-electronic systems. The multiplicity of layers (programs, or functions) or the phenomenalism completes this association, validating the idea that "architecture should not claim its own physical form but must become a device to interpret the form as a phenomenon"⁷.

In the article "Arquitectura pública como punto de paso" (or "The Transparent Urban Forest") Ito stands up for a city composed of transparent and permeable public buildings, as "relativized objects", with heterogeneous functions and spaces that can encourage the flows exchange (fig. 04). Following this principle, the Mediatheque is based on an open system of interchangeable activities trying to achieve a certain functional undefinedness. The integration of an art gallery, a municipal library and an audio-visual media centre seems analogous to an organic process of decomposition, combination or fusion.

In the Mediateque's formal description, understood as an archetype, Ito points out three kind of categories: plates (steel plates), tubes (steel structure) and skin (glass facade). It is referred, again, to the field of natural forms. The plates turn into a square steel slabs of 50 x 50 meters (seven), represented in the drawings as places that contain the flow of users and objects. It is favoured, thus, a system of variable densities able to guarantee a high diversity (the artificial lighting also acquires a important role in the exchange and variations of each floor)⁸. The section also contains this planimetric freedom through variation of heights between plates that accentuates the flexibility of the system. It should be added that the freedom achieved by Le Corbusier in the 'domino system' or Mies van der Rohe in the 'universal space', now is accompanied by a randomness character **(fig. 05)**⁸.

The Mediatheque's structure order and qualify the plan, since its strategic position in each platform guarantees the occupation and an adequate distribution of space. It is formed by 13 biomorphic tubes (like a trees), which penetrate vertically in the plates and support them. Each one, in addition to transport weight, allows the exchange of diverse energies, such as light, air, water or sound. The conception of the structure as something more than a bearing system is also observed in its ornamental dimension, leaves behind the conventions that insist on their independence. The structural function, thus, loses its foundation condition to camouflage itself in a decorative system defining environments and accentuating occupations.

Regarding the corporeity of architecture, the Mediatheque involves a tension between material requirements and the architect's desire to dilute building facade and its limits. The metaphor of the skin shows Ito's aspiration to turn the facade into an interface that could articulate the tangible and the intangible or the natural and the artificial. The real impossibility of this fact, since every architectural form or object is always based on a certain tectonic expression, reveals the limitations of such attempts. Ito, however, seems to delight in this ambiguity, hence his search for the virtual develops around his concerns for the tectonics and its use for metaphorical purposes.

The neutral and abstract space acting as a starting point at the Mediatheque, linked to the modern tradition, is altered through the recovering of architecture figurative quality and its literal and metaphorical ornamentation. This fact not only manifest that the paradox is assumed as a way of thinking, but also that the rejection of form could be compatible with techniques based on figure-ground contrast. At the same time, the use of metaphor by Toyo Ito emphasizes that nature not cease to be a cultural construct. Ito's deep interest in nature, as this project suggests, is not its contemplation or its hygienist values (the romantic and modern models) but its ability to allow us to interpret the cultural changes that the Digital era has introduced in our lives.

NATURE AS ENERGY AND MEMORY: STRATIFICATION OF URBAN SPACE

"On my first visit to the place, even with eighty cars parked there, I was touched by the beauty of the stone surface, the variety of sizes and colours of the material and the way that they shone in the sun. The physical history of Stortoget is based on the movement of these native stones from the neighbouring agricultural lands, where they were stacked forming boundaries for their use in the streets and

the square at baroque town. The presence of this stone in Kalmar's centre recalls its physical transformation, almost primitive, from rural to urban area^{m_0}.

The Caruso St John's project, in collaboration with the Swedish artist Eva Löfdahl, had the task of renewing the main square of Kalmar in order to recover the old identity, lost over time and damaged by the traffic. Ruling out the strategy of *tabula rasa*, the authors conserve the existing fragmentation by restoring the patterns that had characterized the floor plan. This strategy leaves behind the artificial condition that can be perceived in many contemporary urban interventions, assuming the changes and the natural evolution of the urban space itself.

Caruso St John set out a plan based on two systems of order. On the one hand, a regulatory system through perpendicular routes to articulate flows and movements (built on smoother textures such as granite pavers and prefabricated concrete slabs); and, on the other hand, the specific definition of the areas generated by the first system through subtle changes in the stones and the granite's colour (granite boulders of different dimensions originally used in the square). If the first order gives unity to the square, the second allows an expressive richness in the floor's texture, which remembers the organic and heterogeneous condition of natural forms **(fig. 06)**.

The intervention goes beyond the scope of the square itself. The definition of the layout system refers both to its perimeter and to the farthest urban environment, in order to integrate the square itself into the energy, cultural, and material network that appeals to the memory of the city. This definition of place, which seeks to broaden its interpretation as a mere typological interpretation, dissolves the permanence of the traces in a multiple relationship between the renewed space and the surroundings.

The project also seeks the abstraction of the floor plan, without fixing areas for specific uses. This polyvalence seems to assume the memory of the place, which has had multiples uses during its 300 years of existence - from political, military or religious representations to become the commercial heart of the city. In turn, any picturesque furniture or ornament is avoided emphasising the texture of the floor plan itself. Thus, the pavement acquires a clear physical presence, as an organic surface, thanks to the thickness and *chiaroscuro* of the stone patterns (**fig. 07**).

The matter becomes an active and sensitive object, a source of energy to deal with. The architects pay attention to this potential preserved in the displacements and the relocations of cobbles and boulders. The square organization finds in this matter's interpretation the identity of the place; a renewed *genius loci*. The possibility of understanding the square from its material memory assumes a reflective view of the natural and urban environment. The stone rests shifted and gathered, as natural entropic processes, making Stortorget a tangible sign of the city's life. As Adam Caruso points out: "We can also imagine the environment as something that can encompass human effort as well as matter, a territory in which connections can be established between energy and culture"¹¹.

In Stortoget, also, urban space's idea is enriched through these connections between matter and energy, as layers of meaning that seeks, in any case, an architecture that could adopt a wider environmental sphere. The transport of stones from other places of the city to relocate within a new order is conceived as an operation where energy acquires it own expression and which is accumulated in a material that makes sensitive (**fig. 08**). This means an exchange of energy that enables to interpret the form, matter, memory or time within a process closely linked to the natural environment and its processes.

The Kalmar's stones, therefore, are shown as vehicle of energy and memory, which allow the past to emerge on the square surface, as layers of matter. All this within a process formed by stratums, which meaning is collected in the stones themselves. Time is interpreted as a discontinuous and non-linear variable, freed from ties to connect the experience of architecture with the place and life. The square, likewise, is revealed as a result of energy flows, recognizing a stratus of the past; sum of multiple levels that fixes a picture where the past and future are reduced to a specific present. We may well consider Stortoget as an instant place, whose granite stones, consist of energy and memory, dissolve between fleeting sparkles and water sounds.

NATURE AS MEDIATION: THE PERCEPTION OF ATMOSPHERIC SPACE "Exercising the integration of the spectator, or, rather, the spectating itself, as part of the museum's undertaking has shifted the weight from the thing experience do the experience itself. We stage the artefacts, but more importantly, we stage the way the artefacts are perceived. We cultivate nature into landscapes. So, to elude the museum's insistence that there is a nature (if you look hard

enough for it), it is crucial not only to acknowledge that the experience itself is part of the process, but, more importantly, that experience must be presented undisguised to the spectator^{*12}.

"The Mediated Motion" proposes a physical transformation of Kunsthaus Bregenz's architectural space through adding successive layers of nature that the viewers can contemplate in a continuous itinerary. The strict geometry of Peter Zumthor's building becomes in a kind of miniaturized but sublime nature and the museum in a sequence of atmospheric spaces that involve the visitors in its aesthetic density. The artistic efficiency of the installation is based on the immediate perceptive shock produced by the atmosphere of each landscape, which far from become a gimmicky effect, underlies a rigorous staging. The connexion between building and nature, also artificial, constitutes a dialogue where the natural seems to emanate from the artificial and the artificial from the natural.

The exposed work turns into nature and nature into landscape. The landscape architect Günther Vogt collaborates on the project, on the definition of the itinerary, based on the spiral movement that characterizes Zumthor's building, to emphasize the transition from one landscape situation to another. On the ground floor, visitors first encountered a collection of logs sprouting shiitake mushrooms. Moving to the levels above, they came across a pond with floating duckweed on level one, which they could cross via a series of pontoons, and a floor of gently sloping, compressed soil on level two. On the top floor, a suspension bridge spanning a room full of fog terminated abruptly at a blank wall, forcing visitors to return along their original route. The installation generates a tension between conceptual art, with scientific roots, and emotional one, subjective, based on the experience.

Eliasson considers mediation and movement -the two concepts selected to installation's title- essentials to delve into the relation between the human being and the environment. For the Danish artist, mediation supposes "a degree of representation in the experience of a situation"; degrees or levels in continuous changing according to the factors involved in each case. In this sense, mediation is understood from its capacity to generate evaluation, criticism, or reflection; key values of artistic and cultural practice. Regarding the movement, the installation emphasizes the idea of the travel and flow, whereby the spectator builds a critical attitude towards what is observed and perceived. The itinerary is not far from a funfair. The visitor is waiting the next room, expects the following trick (fig. 09). As Eliasson points out: "On all four levels, odours, fog, water, plants, and soil caused the strictly orthogonal, concrete-and-glass architecture of Peter Zumthor to metamorphose into a path of experience and awareness of experiencing"18

The installation also aims to make us reflect on the weather and its capacity for mediation, understood as "nature in the city" whose interest lies in its unpredictability and variability. In the installation, Eliasson manipulates some basic elements of weather such as the water, light, temperature or atmospheric pressure itself. Through the natural phenomenon introduction, the installation promotes to think about how nature is perceived and how it affects in our perception of the environment; "As inhabitants, we have grown accustomed through our progressive experience of city space to the weather as mediated by the city. We experience the weather through the 'city-filter', as well as the other way around"¹⁴.

The use of nature goes with a process of dematerialization, where the atmospheres seem to dilute the limits that contain them. This accentuates the condition of the atmospheric model in which the exhibition aims to become, and encourages to reflect on the changing characteristics of architectural space. The light, projections or fog, used to manipulate the observer perception, provoke feelings that could be described as oneiric. At the same time, the perceptive mechanism tries to broaden those that act as only visual way to emphasize the non-visible ones. From this point of view, Eliasson defines an architectural reality where could be possible a deeper reflection on atmospheric space. These themes would be continued two years later in "The Weather Project", an installation held at the turbine hall of the Tate Modern in London (fig. 10)¹⁶. Both installations emphasise the landscape's idea as a projected image of nature. At the Kunsthaus Bregenz and the Tate Modern, the relation between nature and architecture must be understood from the idea of mediation, where the visitor becomes the protagonist in the interaction with the artistic work. The Danish artist also gets away from the debate 'nature versus culture', to reconsider a field of experience constituted by both. Eliasson proposes that the nature should not be understood as a store of alternative forms to replace the conventional ones, but as energy source to activate our lives and as a backdrop to project them.

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Notes

01. ELIASSON, Olafur, "Seeing Yourself Sensing", in *Leer es respirar, es devenir*, Gustavo Gili, Barcelona, 2012, pp. 24.

02. SMITHSON, Robert, "A Museum of Language in the Vicinity of Art", *Art International*, march 1968. Also in FLAM, Jack, *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Ángeles, Londres, 1996.

03. URSPRUNG, Philip, *Brechas y conexiones: ensayos sobre arquitectura, arte y economía,* Puente Editores, Barcelona, 2016.

04. The "Picturesque Atlas" leads the reader to the history of the nature's invention during nineteenth and twentieth centuries, in harmony with Robert Smithson's ideas. ABALOS, Iñaki, *Atlas pintoresco. Vol. 1: el observatorio pintoresco. Vol. 2: los viajes.* Gustavo Gili, Barcelona, 2005 y 2008. Also: ABALOS, Iñaki, "Thermodynamic beauty", in "Abalos+Sentkiewicz", *2G*, 2010, n. 56, pp. 127-136.

05. ITO, Toyo, "Mediatheque in Sendai", in "Toyo Ito, Sección 1997", *2G*, 1997, n. 2, pp. 26. **06.** As the philosopher Mark Johnson points out, the metaphor may be understood as a mode of understanding through which certain fields of our experience are translated in order to structure another field of different type. JOHN-SON, Mark, *The body in the mind: the bodily basis of meaning, imagination, and reason,* University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1987, pp. XIII.

07. ITO, Toyo, "A Garden of Microchips. The Architectural Image of the Microelectronic Age", in *Escritos*, Colegio Oficial de Aparejadores y Arquitectos Técnicos de Murcia, Murcia, 2000, pp. 146-147.

08. As far as the artificial lighting is concerned, it is clearly visible in the building's images. The different heights of each floor acquire presence and formal and spatial relevance as a consequence of lighting variations - difference in intensity, in colour, or in warmth. These variations are responsible for the spatial diversities between floors, which constitutes a clearly anti-modern use of technology, considering that the representation through iconography is replaced by the spatial manipulation.

09. ITO, Toyo, "La mediateca de Sendai. Informe sobre su proceso de construcción", in *Escritos*, Colegio Oficial de Aparejadores y Arquitectos Técnicos de Murcia, Murcia, 2000, pp. 229-230.

10. CARUSO, Adam, "La energía y la materia", in *The feeling of things: escritos de arquitectura*, Polígrafa, Barcelona, 2008, pp. 19-20.

11. lbid., pp. 15.

12. ELIASSON, Olafur, "Seeing Yourself Sensing", in *Leer es respirar, es devenir*, Gustavo Gili, Barcelona, 2012, pp. 24-25.

13. "In my search for clues to unlock the building -since the building is surely full of preconceptions of how to see and experience-I discovered the generous aspect of the spiral movement that takes you from one floor to the next. In order to take the greatest advantage of your tutored eye and to integrate you as a central player in the exhibition, I realised that enhancing the principle of movement would be the key. Since your movement and orientation is a process in time, I looked for an opportunity and medium to turn this particular process into the object. In one field in particular, the process as object has been cultivated -landscape architecturewhich is why I have turned to Günther Vogt, whose ideas on cultivating process have been a farsighted source for the development of this project: The mediated motion", ELIAS-SON, Olafur, "Dear Everybody", ibid., pp. 14.

14. Eliasson points out: "one might mistakenly take a situation for granted as a 'natural' state of things, being unaware of the constructions lying behind this situation. The challenge of orienting ourselves in a mediated realm is therefore to see through and know when, to what extent, and by whom a situation has been mediated; to be aware of a situation's relationship with time (...) When we can 'see through' the mediation of a situation, when it is transparent, we may experience a degree of heightened self-awareness due to the self-evaluative potential that lies within a situation like this", ELIASSON, Olafur, "Museums Are Radicals", Ibid., pp. 49.

15. In "The Weather Project", the representation of the sun and the sky dominates the space of the Turbine Hall in the Tate Modern. A fine fog expands through space as if it would have come from outside, varying during the day to simulate an atmospheric phenomena. Looking at the ceilings, the fog makes that the roof goes missing, replaced by the reflection of the floor. At the back of the room, we find a giant circle formed by hundreds of mono-frequency lamps. The repeated arc in the mirror produces a brilliant sphere linking the real space with the reflection itself. Generally used in public lighting, mono-frequency lamps emit a low-frequency light that mitigates all the colours except yellow and black. This installation transforms the visual field around the sun into a duotone landscape. PRIETO, Eduardo, "Ars meteorológica. Naturaleza y arquitectura en la obra de Olafur Eliasson", Arquitectura Viva, 2011, n. 141, pp. 74-75.

Images

01. Idea of city; where natural environment and built form an indivisible unit that favors the fluidity and interchangeability. El Croquis, Toyo Ito, 19 febrero 2011.

02. A) Ville Radieuse, Le Corbusier, 1922. B) Crystal Palace, Joseph Paxton, Gran Exposición de Londres de 1951.

03. Model, Sendai Media library, Toyo Ito, 1995-2001.

04. Idea of city; where natural environment and built form an indivisible unit that favors the fluidity and interchangeability. El Croquis, Toyo Ito, 19 febrero 2011.

05. Sketch of the plants and section, Model, Sendai Media library, Toyo Ito, 1995-2001.

06. Floor plan, Stortoget, Kalmar, Caruso St. John, 1999-2003.

07. Pavement detail, Stortoget, Kalmar, Caruso St. John, 1999-2003.

08. Stortoget, Kalmar, Caruso St. John, 1999- 2003.

09. "The Mediated Motion", 31.03-13.05 2001, Kunsthaus Bregenz, Olafur Eliasson.

10. A) "The Mediated Motion", 31.03- 13.05, 2001, Kunsthaus Bregenz. B) "The Weather Project", 16.10.2003 - 21.03.2004, Tate Modern London. Olafur Eliasson.