Introduction: Defining Scale

In 2003, visitors to the National Gallery in London crowded into an exhibition of work by the gallery’s resident Associate Artist, Ron Mueck. Leaning in over the plinths as far as they were permitted, viewers stared incredulously at an intensely realistic and yet notably miniaturised Mother and Child, and Man in a Boot, and at an astonishingly enlarged Pregnant Woman (Plate 1). Amongst the milling, gasping gallery-goers, Mueck’s sculptures, though static and ‘naked’ in their painted fibreglass, were most noticeably and fascinatingly distinct in their unexpected scale. Ironically, given such incredulity, such startling distortions of scale have become increasingly familiar within contemporary art. Since the late 1980s, many artists, including Mark Wallinger, Robert Kusmirowski, Mona Hatoum and Gavin Turk, have created sculpture that addresses scale through enlargement, the life-size and miniaturisation. From the life-like but comically oversized figures made by Maurizio Cattelan to the detailed enlarged or reduced commonplace objects created by Elizabeth Wright, the emergence of a sculpture that emphasises scale has become a conspicuous element in contemporary art.

Alongside such exaggerations, a number of contemporary artists have also constructed recognisable forms that surprise the viewer with their life-size scale: examples include Mark Wallinger’s Ecor Homme, a man-size figure standing amid the enlarged statuary of Trafalgar Square (Plate 2), and Michael Landy’s Semi-detached, a replica of the artist’s childhood home created dramatically to scale inside Tate Britain’s Duveen Galleries (Plate 3). Whilst there can be no clear-cut boundaries defining the ‘life-size’, for the purposes of this study a general understanding of the ‘actual size’ of 1:1 scale will be relied upon. As I shall investigate, the effects of life-size sculpture are very different to those of sculptural enlargements or miniaturisations. Nevertheless, these works form part of the same trend of sculptures whose naturalism allows them to bear a specific and recognisable relation to a familiar size. This book addresses the extent to which this theme permeates
contemporary art and why it has done so, examining the distinction between size and scale, and the effects and implications of this artwork.

This study of enlargement, miniaturisation and the life-size in contemporary sculpture begins with an introductory discussion of the distinction between size and scale. The definitions of each term proposed here will form the basis of the analysis continued throughout. Having addressed the role of the body in relation to this sculpture, the study continues by examining artworks from the last 20 years that have focused on scale through enlargement or miniaturisation. As my focus is upon scale in sculpture and not upon the effects of size, miniaturisation and enlargement will be considered together, as they both figure the same process of scale alteration. This will be followed by a study of life-size works from the same period. Whilst the processes of producing sculpture that appears to be ‘life-sized’, or an ‘enlargement’ may be very similar, the very different interpretations placed upon them here reflect my emphasis upon reception rather than production. Subsequently, the effects of photography and digitisation on sculpture that addresses scale will be examined. The study will conclude with an analysis of these distinct areas as a wider phenomenon of a fascination with the allegorical nature of scale within art production since the end of the 1980s. Throughout the study, possible explanations for the existence of such a trend will be suggested.

While this strand of sculpture has developed over the last 20 years, a play with shifts of scale is clearly not new to the arts. As Robert Rosenblum has commented in a catalogue essay on Ron Mueck, figural sculpture has traditionally ‘come in many sizes’, from Michelangelo’s David (which measures 13.5 feet) to Clodion’s table sculptures.1 As with both these examples, however, the scale of the figure is typically created according to the scale of its intended context – whether on a pedestal in a city square or resting on an interior table. There is a similar long-established convention in terms of the signification of shifts in scale, with enlargement frequently used to express heroism and to cement the monumental, and miniaturisation conventionally used to create a sense of delicacy and malleability. As I shall argue in what follows, the recent exploration of scale in sculpture presents a different set of ambitions and concerns.

Connotations of shifts in scale have also long been present in the pictorial arts, from pre-Renaissance art that eschewed classical perspective to Christian depictions of an out-sized baby Jesus. Rosenblum cites further, more recent, examples, spanning Goya, and Gilbert and George. Whilst I cannot cover pictorial expressions of scale in this book – and they will undoubtedly have contributed to the production of the sculpture studied here, the most explicit example perhaps being Jake and Dinos Chapman’s three-dimensional work inspired by Goya’s etchings – there is clearly a different set of concerns brought to bear by the viewer physically encountering a three-dimensional enlargement or miniaturisation than there is to already having subconsciously adapted to the often other-worldly scale presented in two-dimensions and bounded by the frame. Film too shares, about which Deleuze, among others, has written,2 here the size of the screen, viewing distance and directorial use of close-up have often already undermined the life-size, even before specific scale relations are sometimes introduced, as with The Incredible Shrinking Man, The Attack of the Fifty-Foot Woman or Honey I Shrunk the Kids? Clearly, the sculpture studied here draws upon scale in ways that are very distinct from those presented in two-dimensions.

Some of the most famous examples of scale exaggerations are found within a rich literary history on the topic. Frequently changes of scale have been used – most prominently in English literature by Jonathan Swift and Lewis Carroll, – to explore political and philosophical concerns.3 The recent sculptural trend examined here also manipulates scale to such ends: just as Gulliver’s experience of differently scaled worlds affects his view of his own society, and Alice’s change in size enables her entry into and participation in philosophically challenging adventures, so this sculpture can be seen as an attempt on the part of the artist to provide the viewer with a surprising and potentially provocative perspective. This recent trend within sculpture is intriguing in its relationship both to an art-historical and a contemporary social and political context, and in the philosophical aspects of its enquiry. My aim is to question the confection of this sculpture with the ever-shifting postmodern environment in which it has been created. While much of the artwork can be seen as reflecting the distortions of such a climate, suggesting an acceptance of incommensurability, depthlessness and a simulacral destruction of perspective, I will argue that some of this sculpture can be seen as expressing confidence in the fixed relationship between measurement and meaning. That the sculpture studied here contradicts some of the key tenets of postmodern theory is perhaps connected to the increasingly discussed decline of that theory. Nevertheless, I will suggest that artwork is still being created in reaction to the notions of postmodernism that held sway when the sculptural trend began at the end of the 1980s.

Given that this trend is made up of naturally distinct yet related elements, a study of it demands a thematically organised structure rather than a chronological survey. However, the impact of artistic influences and of contemporary social and political history on this sculptural phenomenon will be included within the specific areas addressed in each part. While the widespread and ongoing nature of this sculptural trend prevents any account from currently presenting an entirely comprehensive survey, a range of artists and work will be studied. Given the practical requirements
involved in exhibiting such – often enormous – sculpture, my focus is on those works which have gained prominence through major exhibitions, sculptural trends will be addressed. Clearly this sculptural effect can be used as an expression of many different artistic concerns; I neither want to imply that all such work is made with the same aim, nor to investigate every issue effect and concern that can be traced across the spectrum of this sculpture.

Whilst the ‘ybas’ contribution to this trend results in much of the sculpture addressed in this study being British, by no means is the trend limited to a national phenomenon. Indeed, a notable factor of this backgrounds of Tom Friedman, Maurizio Cattelan, Wang Qingsong, but a few. Such internationalism is not only due to the nature of the artistic the effects of globalisation and in the art world, and an artistic address presence. Contemporary theorists such as Marc Augé and Paul Virilio have commented upon the distorted perception of scale that today’s technologies and economic systems can produce. For example, while Virilio claims that the life-size is under attack by the pollution of distance, Augé’s complementary ideas suggest that ‘we are in an era characterised by changes of scale’. According to this interpretation, one result would be the changes in scale and distance reflected in the art world itself. Just as the rise of importance and increase in number of art biennials across the world has affected contemporary artistic practice, so has the establishment of architecturally enormous galleries and institutions dedicated to modern art. These developments and their impact upon this strand of sculptural output will also be explored. It will be argued that the acceleration of globalisation since the end of the Cold War in the late 1980s coincides with the development of this sculptural trend of exploring scale.

Throughout the study I shall argue that this pivotal historical ‘turning-point’ and the uncertainties that followed it have impacted upon the fascination with scale that has been expressed in sculpture every since.

The Distinction between Size and Scale

Now, the question arises whether the small-scale model or miniature, which is also the ‘masterpiece’ of the journeyman may not in fact be the universal type of the work of art. All miniatures seem to have an aesthetic quality – and from what should they draw this constant virtue if not from the dimensions themselves? [...]. Further, we may ask whether the aesthetic effect, say, of an episcopal statue which is larger than life derives from its assignment of a man to the size of a rock or whether it is not rather due to the fact that it restores what is at first from a distance seen as a rock to the proportions of a man?

Lévi-Strauss’s suggestion that miniaturisation is the defining characteristic of works of art is based upon a very wide definition of scale; for example, ‘the paintings of the Sistine Chapel are a small-scale model in spite of their imposing dimensions, since the theme which they depict is the End of Time’, while any ‘graphic or plastic transposition’ functions as a ‘reduction of scale’ since volume, smell and tactile impressions are considered lost in the production of a work of art. Thus Lévi-Strauss’s use of the word ‘scale’ functions as a basic comparative between any, even qualitatively different, attributes. This definition provides the anthropologist with the means to produce interesting general statements, similar to Samuel Beckett’s assertion that ‘Art tends not to make bigger, but to shrink’. For the purposes of this study, however, a narrower definition of scale will be asserted with the aim of enabling more specific analysis.

In order to acknowledge and examine this trend with precision, at the heart of the book is a proposed definition of scale and of size that emphasises the distinction and relation between the two. This account of scale in contemporary sculpture, and the definition of scale and size it outlines, will draw upon the writing of Henri Bergson, whose ideas about measurement and its role in perception offer a productive framework for such a topic, and whose philosophy notably regained prominence in the 1990s. As a quantified ratio, scale is based upon measurement, upon the division of a whole. This process of division is argued to be the very foundation of perception by Bergson, who claimed in Matter and Memory that perception involves an arbitrary division imposed upon ‘concrete extensity’. Such is the primary and the most apparent operation of the perceiving mind: it marks out divisions in the continuity of the extended, simply following the suggestions of our requirement and the needs of practical life. But, in order to divide the real in this manner, we must first persuade ourselves that the
philosophy's influence on art of the twentieth century has been argued by Antliff, who claims a 'seminal role' for Bergsonism in 'shaping the art and politics of the Fauvist, Cubist and Futurist movements'. Nevertheless, Bergson's popularity declined sharply as his philosophy came to be considered dangerous.3 Bergsonism became seen as a precursor to the 'qualitative and organismic definition of time and space developed by "romantic" fascism', which used such debates to emphasise nationalism and racial grouping.4 This was certainly not the view of Bergson himself. While Antliff argues that 'the Bergsonism of these art movements [Fauvism, Cubism and Futurism] bears comparison to the ideological precepts underpinning fascism', he is always careful to distinguish the legacy of Bergsonism from that of Bergson, who 'defended republican and democratic principles throughout his life'.5 Nevertheless, Bergson's remarkable popularity had waned to such an extent after the First World War that, according to Mullarkey's recent study, 'it was all but indiscernible by the 1920s'.6 Mullarkey also argues that the subsequent lack of interest in Bergson's philosophy was in part a result of its widespread popularity, causing it to lose distinctiveness among other movements which appropriated it, including phenomenology, existentialism and structuralism.7

Mullarkey's research, published under the title The New Bergson, is chiefly occupied with addressing a resurgence of interest in Bergsonian philosophy in the 1990s. This renewed enthusiasm for Bergson's writing is attributed by Mullarkey in part to interest in Gilles Deleuze, and the affiliations between the two philosophers' approaches: increasingly, connections have been traced between Deleuze's exploration of difference and Bergson's concept of durée. Mullarkey claims a 'real kinship' between the method and results of these philosophies,8 while John Marks has gone so far as to suggest that in his writing on cinema, Deleuze 'completes a train of thought that Bergson suggested but never completed'.9 Certainly, given Deleuze's current fashionable in a period when students of fine art have been encouraged to read 'critical theory', his fascination with Bergson will have brought new readers to Bergsonian philosophy. The importance that both Bergson and Deleuze ascribe to art, and the trite way which they bestow upon artists, has also encouraged the interest of the art world in their theories.

Bergson's use of the distinction between quantitative and qualitative difference is sustained but varied. Deleuze reads this relationship as the heart of Bergsonian philosophy, stating in his essay 'Bergson's Conception of Difference':

What Bergson essentially reproaches in his predecessors is not having seen the true differences of nature. [...] Where there were differences in nature, we have retained only differences in degree. No doubt the opposite reproach sometimes appears: where there were only differences of degree, we have introduced differences of nature, for example between [...] the perception of matter and matter itself. But this record of the same critique has neither the frequency nor the importance of the first.
Indeed, this emphasis upon the mistaken overlooking of qualitative difference— in Deleuze’s terms, difference of nature— becomes distilled even further towards the end of Deleuze’s essay. In the end there is only one sort of problem: problems whose expression does not respect differences of nature.28 Such a reading should be considered in relation to Deleuze’s own use of the same distinction in *Difference and Repetition.*29 There, as Mullarkey has noted, the qualitative is aligned with pure difference, the quantitative with repetition.26 Mullarkey has claimed that, unlike Deleuze, Bergson ‘refrains from prioritising pure difference’, instead giving repetition and difference ‘equal status’.27 Mullarkey connects this attribution to Bergson’s refusal to cite materialism as ‘absolutely true or […] absolutely false’.28 Bergson certainly does make a connection between the distinction between qualitative and quantitative difference and that between materialism and idealism; however, he seems closer than Mullarkey suggests to a rejection of materialism when he states in *Matter and Memory*:

Were there to seem to be inextensibility and quality, on the one hand, exteriority and quantity, on the other, we have replicated materialism, which derives the first term from the second, but neither do we accept idealism, which holds that the second is constructed by the first.29

This passage highlights both an apparent cleverness with which Bergson is happy to separate qualitative and quantitative difference, and the crucial position of the distinction within Bergson’s thinking.

Nevertheless, Mullarkey has noted the movement within Bergson’s philosophy itself, and has traced a development within it in regard to the relationship between qualitative and quantitative difference. Mullarkey states that Bergson’s emphasis moves from the dominance of qualitative change to a more nuanced relationship in *Matter and Memory*, followed by later work in which a view of quantity ‘subtends’ quality.30 While Bergson seems to accept the interrelation of the two in his later writing, suggesting that a difference in degree, if large enough, has the potential to generate a difference in nature, still Mullarkey fervently restates Bergson’s belief in the ‘irreducible difference between quality and quantity despite these relations of production between them’.31 With regard to the correlation proposed in this book between quality and size, and between quantity and scale, such interrelation would seem to stand: the two are never entirely divorced from the other, and yet technically enlargement and miniaturisation does require a qualitatively different object, an object ‘X’, as well as a quantitatively (and proportionately) different size to object ‘a’.

Yet, if all difference can be considered as mostly qualitative or quantitative, then the differentiation between the two terms itself begins to appear paradoxical. Mullarkey sees the question as a ‘type of Russellian paradox’: to claim that a difference in kind or degree differentiates differences in kind from differences of degree would be impossible without acknowledging the non-existence of one or the other, which would thereby render the very claim redundant.32 The question of this fundamental differentiation is answered, in Mullarkey’s view, by Bergson’s concept of ‘qualitative multiplicity’, which accommodates both the qualitative and quantitative:

It represents a higher-order difference which separates and subsumes quality and quantity, one which cannot be conceived in terms of either and yet which generates both. The quality of the multiple and the quantity of the one or same are mutually implicative, despite operating at different levels. Likewise, difference and repetition are not identical, but necessarily held in a relationship of reciprocal dependency. These are internal dichotomies rather than external dualisms.33

Such questions of ‘mutual implicativity’ and ‘reciprocal dependency’ go to the very heart of the questions raised by much of this sculpture, which probe, as I shall examine in greater detail below, the role of difference and comparison in the nature of definition—as well as the role of definition in the nature of difference and comparison.

While Mullarkey outlines qualitative multiplicity as the means by which Bergson reconciles the relationship between qualitative and quantitative difference, the acknowledgement that an increasing quantitative difference will eventually result in qualitative difference nevertheless implies a diachronic relationship between the two. Deleuze has been keen to distinguish Bergson’s philosophy from dialectical philosophy, be it of Plato or Hegel. According to Deleuze, both Plato and Hegel stop short of the internal difference which Deleuze champions in Bergson’s writing. Internal difference is not reliant on a principle of finality, as in Plato, in which ‘the difference of the thing comes from its use, its end, its destination’.34 Nor is internal difference reliant upon contradiction, as in Hegel, in which ‘the thing differs from itself because it differs in the first place from all that it is not’.35 Rather, Bergson’s aim was to suggest the existence of difference in itself, untethered to external limitations or contrasts:

Internal difference will have to be distinguished from contradiction, alterity, negation. This is where the Bergsonian theory and method of difference is opposed to that other method, that other theory of difference that is called the dialectic; as much Plato’s dialectic of alterity as Hegel’s dialectic of contradiction, both implying the power and presence of the negative. The originality of the Bergsonian conception is in showing that internal difference does not go and must not go to the point of contradiction, to alterity, to the negative, because these three notions are in fact less profound than it or are merely external views of this internal difference. To think internal difference as such, as pure internal difference, to reach the pure concept of difference, to raise difference to the absolute, such is the direction of Bergson’s effort.36

According to this Deleuzian reading then, both Platonic and Hegelian dialectical philosophies are reliant upon ‘external difference’, whereas
Bergson’s philosophy suggests that ‘the thing differs from itself in the first place, immediately’. The filtration of such theoretical debate into contemporary art production frequently involves a dilution of its nuances, and so it is the broader, more straightforward distinction between quantitative and qualitative difference that has perhaps made most impact. Yet, as shall be argued, much of the contemporary sculpture exploring scale presents a fascination with the apparent tethering of essence to comparison, and with the need for external references in the construction of difference.

The sculpture studied here is that which presents a difference of quantity or degree, and not sculpture that, although exceptionally large or small, has a difference of quality or kind from other objects already existing in the world.

In short, I will address sculpture that presents a concept of scale rather than one of size. While of course all sculpture tends to be appreciated in terms of a size relation to the human body, this study will focus upon specific and manifest scale relations, rather than these more vague experiential interpretations. A more detailed examination of the role of the viewer’s body in relation to sculpture that exaggerates scale follows below. The similarity necessary to create an impact of scale according to the above definition clearly requires the sculptural object to be recognizable as an object that is normally perceived as a different size. All the sculpture studied here then is to a large extent naturalistic. The study will encompass work that appears exceptionally realistic, such as Ron Mueck’s fibreglass ‘bodies’, as well as those that are recognizable but which bear some obvious differences – for example, colour – in works such as Marc Quinn’s marble sculpture Alison Lapper Pregnant (Plate 4). Whilst accepting that the distinction between abstraction and naturalism is not always clear-cut, this study nevertheless proposes a practical differentiation between works whose degree of naturalism isolates and emphasises scale, and works whose degree of abstraction renders their dimensions primarily interesting in terms of size. The connection between scale and naturalism is significant, especially in the context of an acknowledgement of the resurgence of figurative in contemporary art, noted in Hal Foster’s book, The Return of the Real, in 1996. However, this study does not follow Foster’s Lacanian-inspired argument for the traumatic nature of the real re-emerging at the heart of contemporary art – a model that combines both referential and simulacral readings into a third reading of ‘traumatic realism’. Rather, in tracing the relationship between a sculptural exploration of scale with ideas of measurement, standardisation and their connection to meaning, I will consider both the referential and simulacral in relation to theories of difference, as suggested by Deleuze’s reading of Bergson.

My focus upon scale and naturalism means that many recent artworks embracing the enormous or the minuscule will not be dealt with in this study. Olafur Eliasson’s The Weather Project, for example, as an installation encouraging viewers to enter into both a glowing mist and social interaction – on an average day, how often would you talk about the weather? – seemed more concerned with enchanting viewers into its enormous dry-ice-filled arena and finding their reflections on the mirrored ceiling than it was with presenting a sculptural meditation upon scale. Neither will the book examine works that explore or celebrate size rather than presenting the replication of reality necessary to an examination of scale. Anish Kapoor’s Marsyas, for example, though a powerful demonstration of the effect of size on the viewer, is too abstract an object to be compared with another of a usual size, unlike, for example, Damien Hirst’s Charity, an enlarged charity collection tin (Plate 5). While there are clearly gradations of abstraction, here I will concentrate on the strand of sculpture that has isolated scale as a concern by faithfully recreating objects so as to be recognisable in most aspects apart from their size. Equally, while the life-size will be addressed because many artists have recreated objects on a life scale, such as Michael Landy’s Semi-detached in Tate Britain in 2004, the study will address only works that have been manifestly constructed. The book will not cover ‘readymade’ works, for example, as the size here is more easily viewed as a secondary concern to, as well as an essential aspect of, the concept of using an already existing object; the size of the piece is not an isolated aspect of artistic intention.

Measuring Scale: Recent Approaches

The topic of scale in contemporary sculpture has only been dealt with narrowly, with little sustained and specific attention given to a phenomenon that has continued to be consciously present and culturally revealing. Previous writing upon this topic has largely consisted of piecemeal comments on scale as one aspect of artists’ work in monographs, or relatively brief and generalised thought produced for catalogues of group exhibitions. When a distinction between size and scale is made, it is often by artists and critics alike, statements of difference are rarely accompanied by clear and consistent definitions. Barnett Newman’s decision that ‘size doesn’t count. It’s scale that counts. It’s human scale that counts’ is an example of both the emphatic fervour and the blurry ambiguity with which the differentiation between scale and size is often made. The most notable text dealing with the gigantic and the minuscule in the arts has been written by Susan Stewart. Stewart’s On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection concentrates upon the effects of bigness and smallness, and so addresses size rather than scale. Among the important and fascinating features of the miniaturization of the miniature to the ideal and the gigantic to the grotesque. In doing so, she follows Edmund Burke’s alignment of beauty with smallness, and Swift’s Gulliver in his repulsion at enormous Brobdingnagian bodies and admiration for minuscule Lilliputian ones.
Stewart’s account goes on to link the miniature to the private, domesticated world of the interior, and the gigantic to the collective world of the external:

Whereas the miniature represents closure, interiority, the domestic, and the overly cultural, the gigantic represents infinity, exteriority, the public, and the overly natural. [...] Whereas we know the miniature as a spatial whole or as temporal parts, we know the gigantic only partially. [...] Consequently, both the miniature and the gigantic may be described through metaphors of containment – the miniature as contained, the gigantic as container.

Such observations relating to different sizes are of course relevant to this study; as will be discussed, size and scale can never be entirely divorced. Yet Stewart’s account does not address the effects of scale as distinct from the effects of size; enlargement is not considered separately from the gigantic, nor is miniaturisation considered as distinct from the minute. Indeed, even the lack of definite article required to talk about the former compared to its use for the latter suggests one key difference between scale and size; namely an – at least implicit – process. On Lengel also varies from this study in that much of the book has a literary basis, examining the miniature and the gigantic in fairy-tales and satire, from Tom Thumb to Gulliver’s Travels. It thus focusses upon the effects of size in terms of their narrative, encompassing a consideration of memory and accumulation. Writing in 1993, Stewart’s work predates much of the sculpture studied here.

While some writers, including Robert Rosenblum and Susanna Greewe, have commented on scale in monographs on particular artists, an emphasis upon scale as a concept has been made most closely in literature written for exhibitions taking scale as their theme. Marius Kwint and Natalie Rudd have done this for the exhibition catalogue accompanying the 2004 Hayward and Arts Council Collection touring exhibition, Size Matters. Kwint provides a wide-ranging discussion of various aspects and artistic uses of size, from childhood growth to miniatures as souvenirs, from Shelley’s Ozymandias to Philip Astley’s use of models in his eighteenth-century circus. Having briefly considered Swift’s ridiculing of Enlightenment rationality through the relativity of Gulliver’s size to his surroundings, Kwint concludes the essay with a paragraph which suggests that the various artists’ use of scale in the exhibition is expressive of one shared concern:

It seems that many of the artists featured in Size Matters are adapting this rich conceptual tradition to the present age of anxious faith in militaristic strategies that attempt to dominate space and standardise political culture. Some of the most obvious threats that face us now are supposed to take shape in the realm of micro- or nanotechnologies, computer and bio-engineering, which most of the public is not expected to understand. However, through fairly simple but perspicaciously courageous acts of defying the seductive powers of scale, the works in Size Matters alert us to the artefacts by which such technological fascinations are constructed.

This brief passage demonstrates Kwint’s identification of an artistic exploitation of scale as a response to technological development, political standardisation and spatial concerns. This reading has much in common with the specific claims of this study, which include a consideration of the connection between this sculpture and the related areas of digitisation, globalisation and the perception of distance.

Rudd, as the curator of Size Matters, uses her catalogue essay to detail some of the fundamental effects of shifts in scale, from a subversion of expectations to a loss of function. Yet, as indicated in the title of the exhibition, here too there is no distinction drawn between scale and size, and so Rudd also notes the voyeuristic nature of viewing a miniature, and the unsettling threat of the gigantic. This curatorial blurring between scale and size was also present in the choice of artworks for the exhibition, which ranged from clear sculptural enlargements and miniaturisations, including Laura Ford’s “soft toy” Giraffe (1998), enlarged to measure 370 x 300 x 100 cm, and Marieke Nedecker’s Stolen Sunsets (1996), a “mountain range” miniaturised to fit a tank measuring just 180 x 45 x 45 cm, to artworks presenting extremes of size: for example Cornelia Parker’s Small Thought (1994), a printed circuit board decorated with silver, which deals not with miniaturisation but with minuteness, and Kathy Prendergast’s The End and The Beginning (1996), a thread made up of generations of human hair, wound around a small wooden spool. As a minuscule means of expressing a vast amount of time and number of people, Prendergast’s work attempts to locate profundity in contrasting extremes – the end and the beginning, the minute and the vast. However, in terms of size at least, these extremes are qualitatively different; the work does not function as a direct expression of scale.

In an article boldly entitled ‘No More Scale: The Experience of Size in Contemporary Sculpture’, published in Artforum in 2004, James Meyer mourned the loss of ‘scale’ in contemporary sculpture. Indeed, Meyer’s disappointment at the way in which ‘size, at present, is often marshalled to overwhelm and pacify’ is reminiscent of Barbara Rose’s dissatisfaction at the scaling-up of already existing artwork in order to create monumental sculpture in the late 1960s. Meyer bemoans the dominance of enormous size in much contemporary installation art, including Elinson’s The Weather Project. Meyer’s article met with immediate retaliation from Dan Smith in Art Monthly, arguing against the lack of criticality that Meyer supposedly of large installations exhibited by major art institutions. Yet both Meyer’s discussion of such work and his description of a loss of scale in contemporary sculpture are of course diagnosed according to his own somatic definition of scale.

Despite championing the work of Charles Ray, which is discussed below, Meyer does not acknowledge the persistent use of enlargement, miniaturisation and the life-size by many artists since the 1990s. Meyer’s
argument suggests a different interpretation of the relation between size and scale from the one proposed in this book:

Where once scale implied a calibrated relation between a viewer and a work within a modernist gallery of knowable proportions, in the practices in question a scale that exceeds our perceptual understanding — i.e., size — has become prevalent. [...] The present argument explains how the concept of installation is increasingly one that depends on the experience of size, and how this has subsumed the phenomenological and critical ambitions of an earlier period [...] 56

According to Meyer's argument then, the distinction between size and scale rests upon the imperceptibility that he awards to size. This model thus denies the colloquial use of the word 'size' as simply a denotation of physical measurement: for example, the miniature, as a scale within 'our perceptual understanding', is denied a measurement of size altogether, except for being its 'opposite'.57 Clearly then, Meyer's subsequent appreciation of scale and dismissal of size in sculpture applies only to the terms according to this definition. His suggestion that sculptural scale functions as a relation to the object's environment and its viewer's body differs from this account which defines scale as a measurement of quantitative differences between two similar objects. (A discussion of the relation that sculptural enlargements and miniaturisations bear to the viewer's body follows below.) Nevertheless, Meyer's acknowledgement of the loss of a 'calibrated relation' between sculpture and environment is shared by the latter definition proposed here. Enlargements and miniaturisations prompt their viewer to relate them to the more familiar size of recognisable objects, rather than to the scale of the context or environment. This is in direct contrast to installation and performance art, which often requires the viewer to enter, immerse themselves and sometimes participate in the work, responding to a specially formed environment, rather than puncturing it with a separate scale. The deliberate contextual disconnection presented by sculptural enlargements and miniaturisations, and often by life-size works, will be considered below.

T.J. Clark has suggested another different account of the relationship between size and scale in a lecture given at MoMA in New York in 1999. Discussing 'Pollock's Smallness', Clark, whilst never giving a straightforward definition of either term, does state some attributes of both:

Normally speaking, size is literal, a matter of actual, physical intimation. It involves grasping how big or small a certain object really is, most likely in relation to the size of the viewer's upright body or outstretched arms. Of course this assessment is relational, which is to say, metaphorical; but equally obviously, the relating of everything to body size and reach of hand is primordial, part of our evolutionary inheritance. Size is experienced as immediate, as given in the nature of things. [...] Scale, on the other hand, is unabashedly metaphorical, and accepts size as mere effect of representation.60

These characteristics resonate with those attributed to scale and size by Norman Bryson in a recent essay on the work of Robert Therrien; Bryson, like Clark, identifies scale as the 'subtle' of the two terms, being 'more agile and flexible than its gross counterpart, mere size, either bigger or smaller.'58 Writers' conception of 'mere size' as presenting an immediate, literal, bodily presence is not the same as their conception of 'scale' as contained within the virtual, being able to change the scale of the sculpture to suit the environment. These characteristics are also in line with the definition of scale and size offered in this book, and are also well in line with the effects of the sculpture studied here, which often notably in line with the effects of the sculpture studied here, which often

The Role of the Body in the Perception of Scale

As Clark implies, and as one outcome of the definition of scale employed here, the body is more removed from the perception of scale than is from the perception of size. While this statement may seem counter-intuitive, it does not deny the phenomenologically centred subject any more than it denies the interrelatedness of size and scale. However, the statement does offer an important explanation for the effect that much of the sculpture studied in this book provokes. According to this definition then, Robert Morris's 1967 attempt to define scale over-emphasises the importance of the body:

In the perception of relative size the human body enters into the total continuum of sizes and establishes itself as a constant on that scale. [...] The awareness of scale is a function of the comparison made between that constant, one's own body size, and the object. Space between the subject and the object is implied in such a comparison.62

Morris's definition is concerned with a comparison between qualitatively different elements — body and object — and so is more accurate as a description of the perception of size and the function of measurement than it is as a definition of scale. Thus the first sentence is more correct than the second one which introduces an unacknowledged change of terms. Morris's statement also raises many questions about the constancy of the subject's body, the constancy of the subject's perception of their own body and indeed of the distinction between subject and object.

The variability of the body is touched upon in Susan Stewart's account of size. Whilst sharing Morris's view that the body is our mode of perceiving scale, Stewart does begin to acknowledge some of the more intricate considerations that undermine an idea of permanent physical constancy:
Although the body serves as a 'still centre', or constant measure, of our articulation of the miniature and the gigantic, we must also remember the ways in which the body is interpreted by the miniature and exteriorized, made public, by the display modes of the gigantic. [...] Cnesque or symmetrical, the body's place and privileges are regulated by a social discourse, a discourse which articulates the body's very status as the subjective.50

Stewart himself situates the body within a discourse of use-value and exchange-value economies, a term indirectly suggesting that Morris's definition applies only to the former. So while 'under a use-value economy, exaggeration takes place in relation to the scale of proportion offered by the body', the development of culture under an exchange economy displaces the body as the fundamental constant of perception.

It is clear that in order for the body to exist as a standard of measurement, it must itself be exaggerated into an abstraction of an ideal. [...] As an experience is increasingly mediated and abstracted, the lived relation of the body to the phenomenological world is replaced by a nostalgic myth of contact and presence. [...] In this process of distancing, the memory of the body is replaced by the memory of the object, a memory standing outside the self and thus presenting both a surplus and lack of significance. The experience of the object lies outside the body's experience – it is saturated with meanings that will never be fully revealed to us.51

One implication of Stewart's statement is that both Morris's definition and his sculptural aims are aligned with a utopian desire for a use-value economy, where 'the lived relation of the body to the phenomenological world' is the central concern of sculpture. Alex Potts has described Minimalism in just such terms, underlining its emphasis on the nature of three-dimensional art as something that has to be experienced in real space and time, thus divorcing itself from the Modernist ideal of the self-sustaining art object. Potts discusses a 1978 essay by Morris entitled 'The Present Tense of Space' in which the artist dismisses photography as an inadequate means for conveying the essence of a sculpture which consists in the immediate physical experience of the work. Photography of Minimalist sculpture prevents the works' ability to 'escape modern culture's reifications of the world as an object or image'.52 For Morris, photography seems to be one of the mediations or abstractions that replaces the Merleau-Pontyan interrelatedness and mutuality of self and world with the 'distancing' described by Stewart.

It is key that this very distancing should place an emphasis on memory in Stewart's account. While Morris's 1967 definition of scale emphasizes a tri-part relationship between subject, object, and space in between the two, the sculptures studied in this book extend this triangular projection into a four-part relationship, consisting of the subject, object, space in between the two, and the remembered, virtual, 'normal sized' object that is like the object in every aspect except size. This, then, is in line with the photographic nature of much of this contemporary sculpture; while Morris mourns the loss of size perception through the body in photography, he is mourning the qualitative 'use-value' ideal described by Stewart at the hands of an exchange-value-based culture that retains image and object as refined quantifiable ratios that can be scaled independently of bodily lived experience. The awareness of scale is a function of the comparison made between one object, as constant, and another similar object of a different size. Even when standing in front of much of the sculpture discussed in this book, one's own body is abstracted through the extra emphasis awarded to the memory – itself clearly a physical process dependent upon the bodily appreciation of size – of another, 'virtual' object. While size is a measurement in relation to the constant of one's own body, scale distances one's body to a secondary position.

Notes

9. Ibid., p. 33.
12. Ibid., pp. 209-10.
18. Ibid., p. 11.
INTRODUCTION: DEFINING SCALE

21. Ibid., p. 2.
24. Ibid., p. 46.
27. Ibid., p. 142.
28. Ibid., p. 142.
31. Ibid., p. 145.
32. Ibid., p. 145.
33. Ibid., p. 146.
34. Deleuze, ‘Bergson’s Conception of Difference’, p. 52.
35. Ibid., p. 53.
36. Ibid., p. 49.
37. Ibid., p. 53.
41. Susan Stewart, On Longing: Narrative of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection (London, 1992).
43. Swift, Gulliver’s Travels, p. 95.
44. Stewart, On Longing, pp. 79-73.
51. Ibid., p. 228.