

# A substitute for history: the origins and exhibition of Rachel Whiteread's 'Untitled (Room 101)', 2003

by JAMES LAWRENCE

IN NOVEMBER 2003, *Untitled (Room 101)* (Fig.46), by Rachel Whiteread, appeared in the Italian Cast Court at the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, where it remained until the following summer. In contrast to the ornate surfaces, elegant contrapposto and fluid modelling of the surrounding casts, the new object presented a rectilinear mass of pockmarked planes and stodgy architectural details. The parenthetical title alludes to the place of final torture in George Orwell's novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949) but refers specifically to the real source of the sculpture: Room 101 at Broadcasting House (Fig.45), the headquarters that George Val Myer and Francis James Watson-Hart designed for the British Broadcasting Corporation. A widespread legend held that Room 101 served as Orwell's office when he worked for the Eastern Service during the Second World War. Early coverage and subsequent discussion of *Untitled (Room 101)* emphasised this unsubstantiated literary connection – all the more resonant in 2003, the centenary of Orwell's birth – and the connotations of authoritarian menace that flow from it.<sup>1</sup> This article focuses on less allusive aspects, including the circumstances that led to the creation of the sculpture; the physical conditions of its origins, form and public display; and the interpretive consequences of those physical traits.

The idea behind *Untitled (Room 101)* arose from a major redevelopment project involving Broadcasting House and its surroundings. The 'W1 Project', as it was known, reflected the aims of the BBC's 'three site strategy' to rationalise its activities and property portfolio in London.<sup>2</sup> By 2001, the BBC was operating out of twenty-three buildings spread across the city, each of which held its own conditions and restrictions – including heritage designations that severely limited changes to the buildings. Related to this were two long-standing operational problems: an inflexible technological infrastructure that could not be easily revised once in place; and boundaries that separated activities according to bureaucratic habit and obsolete requirements. At the heart of the 'W1 Project' was the intention to bring all the BBC's national and international news divisions to Broadcasting House, along with the World Service and national radio.<sup>3</sup> In November 2001 the BBC filed a planning application with Westminster City Council for the extensive refurbishment of Broadcasting House, and the redevelopment of surrounding land. Conditional approval followed in November 2002.<sup>4</sup> The first phase of the project – the refurbishment of Broadcasting House, the demolition of Egton House in Langham Street and



45. Broadcasting House, 2–22 Portland Place, London W1. 1932. Designed by George Val Myer and Francis James Watson-Hart. (Photograph by Janet Hall, 1995; RIBA Library Photographs Collection).

the construction of the Egton Wing on the site – concluded in January 2006. The second phase, the construction of a new extension that unifies the north end of Broadcasting House and the Egton Wing, is due for completion in 2012.<sup>5</sup>

The BBC's planning statement promised a public art programme in accordance with the Council's Unitary Development Plan and cited the 'precedents set by Broadcasting House in the 1930s'. An 'externally advised Public Art Group' within the BBC was to provide a Public Art Plan at the determination stage of the application.<sup>6</sup> Primary responsibility for devising the programme of art rested with Modus Operandi, a firm of public art consultants that formed part of the consultancy team for the proposed redevelopment.<sup>7</sup> In January 2002 the Council's Public Art Advisory Panel approved the BBC's draft proposals for a public art programme.<sup>8</sup> This comprised five permanent commissions; temporary works, mostly huge vinyl banners that concealed the south elevation, or 'prow', of Broadcasting House during construction; education and outreach projects in which creative artists worked with local schools and colleges; and 'artists-on-

The author thanks Rachel Whiteread; Hazel Willis and Eoin Taylor at Rachel Whiteread's studio; Cristina Colomar and Chloe Barter at Gagosian Gallery, London; Marjorie Trusted at the Victoria and Albert Museum; Jack Fortescue and Roger Kite at Acme Studios; Mark Wainwright at the Barbican Arts Group Trust; and Richard Robinson at MJP Architects Ltd.

<sup>1</sup> See esp. C. Townsend: 'Live As If Someone is Always Watching You', in *idem*, ed.: *The Art of Rachel Whiteread*, London 2004, pp.197–213; R. Cork: 'Rachel Whiteread and "Room 101"', in E. Schneider, ed.: *exh. cat. Rachel Whiteread. Walls, Doors, Floors and Stairs*, Bregenz (Kunsthhaus Bregenz) 2005, pp.94–100; and R. Carley: 'The Foreign Body: Rachel Whiteread's "Untitled (Room 101)" in the Italian Cast Court', in C. McCarthy and G. Matthewson, eds.: *Inhabiting Risk:*

*Proceedings of the 3rd Conference of the Interior Design/Interior Architecture Educators Association*, Wellington 2007, pp.17–25.

<sup>2</sup> 'The BBC's management of three major estate projects', London, National Audit Office, Report to the BBC Trust (13th January 2010), p.12.

<sup>3</sup> 'BBC planning statement' (23rd November 2001), pp.6–9; London, City of Westminster planning application no.01/09569/FULL (cited hereafter as CWPA). Broadcasting House is a Grade II\* listed building.

<sup>4</sup> CWPA, decision notice (28th November 2002).

<sup>5</sup> See the report cited at note 2 above, p.13. By January 2010, the project was more than three years behind schedule and £58 million over budget.

<sup>6</sup> Planning statement cited at note 3 above, pp.37–38.



46. *Untitled (Room 101)*, by Rachel Whiteread. 2003. Jesmonite and mixed media, 300 by 500 by 643 cm. (Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris; photographed by Mike Bruce in 2003 in the Cast Courts of the Victoria and Albert Museum, London; courtesy of Gagosian Gallery, London).

site', six commissioned responses to the history and redevelopment of Broadcasting House.

Intertwined themes of intangibility and interactivity ran through the programme. Four of the five permanent commissions employ lights, from Jaume Plensa's *Breathing* (2005), a roof-mounted light sculpture dedicated to journalists who have been killed in action, to Ron Haselden's *Close-up* (2004–), an ever-growing archive of digital portraits of staff and visitors that a series of LED screens displays at random. Two of the six 'artists-on-site' projects are photographic series documenting the staff and architectural transformation of Broadcasting House. Three

are videos, including *Flight* (2002) by Catherine Yass, first shown in the 2002 Turner Prize exhibition at Tate Britain.<sup>9</sup> The sixth project, Whiteread's *Untitled (Room 101)*, was imbued with a different kind of intangibility, the aura of combined popular myth and literary allusion.

The legend that Orwell used the number of a room at the BBC for the torture site in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is an enduring one. The possibility that his office was Room 101 at Broadcasting House was sufficiently tantalising to prompt Vivien Lovell, Director of Modus Operandi, to invite Whiteread to visit Room 101 prior to its demolition.<sup>10</sup> An article by Richard Brooks in

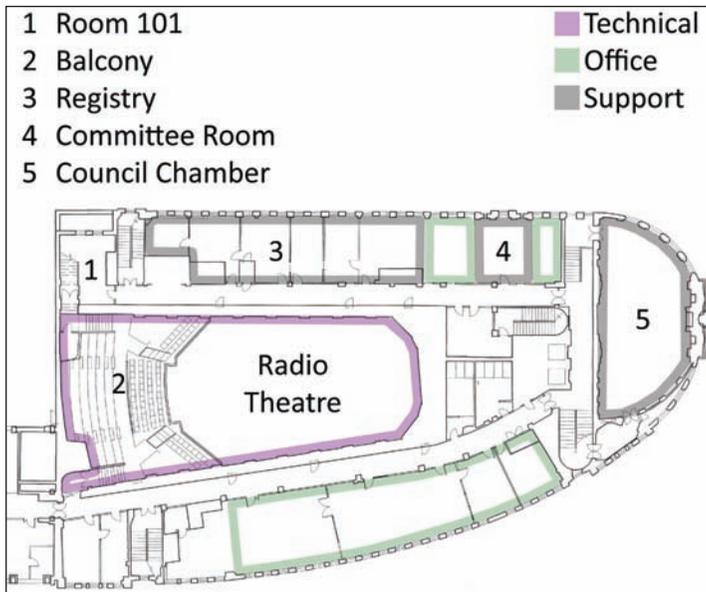
<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 3–4.

<sup>8</sup> CWPA, Major Planning Applications Committee report (27th June 2002), pp. 56–57. The general terms of the Public Art Plan formed part of a legal agreement, dated 28th November 2002, between the BBC and the City of Westminster; CWPA. Westminster, like other local authorities, prefers a public art component in major planning applications. Several newspaper articles have criticised the Public Art Plan without accurately presenting the financial or administrative arrangements of the art commissions; see, for example, A. Barnett: '£4m price tag of BBC art collection', *The Observer* (26th March 2006), p. 7.

<sup>9</sup> The permanent works are: *Breathing*, by Jaume Plensa; *Close-up*, by Ron Haselden;

*Light work* (2003–06), by Tony Cooper and Martin Richman; *World* (unfinished), by Mark Pimlott; and Broadcasting House interior colour scheme (2004), by Antoni Malinowski. The temporary programme included: *Night light* (2002–03), by David Ward; *Signal* (2003), by Fiona Rae; *Acts of inscribing* (2004), by William Furlong; and *Kefuffle* (2004), by Liz Rideal. The artists-on-site and their works were: *Flight*, by Catherine Yass; *Presence* (2002), by Brian Catling; *Between stations* (2002), by Tom Gidley; architectural documentation (2002–), by John Riddy; *Radio with pictures* (2003–), by Nick Danziger; and *Untitled (Room 101)*, by Rachel Whiteread.

<sup>10</sup> Vivien Lovell (Modus Operandi) to Whiteread, 14th March 2003; London, "Untitled (Room 101)" file, Rachel Whiteread studio (cited hereafter as RWS).



47. Plan of the first floor of Broadcasting House showing original uses. (Drawing courtesy of MJP Architects Ltd.; annotations by the author).

*The Sunday Times* quickly presented the commission as a settled matter.<sup>11</sup> This was premature, for the necessary logistics, resources and official approval from the BBC Public Art Group (chaired by Alan Yentob, then Director of Drama, Entertainment and Children's BBC) were not yet in place. Brooks indicated that the BBC planned to display Whiteread's piece in 'one of several new public spaces' after the refurbishment, an aspiration consistent with the BBC's representations to Westminster City Council. Brooks also overstated the connection between Orwell and Room 101 in Broadcasting House before conceding that the connection was dubious. He quoted Peter Davison, editor of the *Complete Works of George Orwell* (1998), who stated that 'Room 101 was at another building – 55 Portland Place',<sup>12</sup> which is 300 metres north-north-west of Broadcasting House. In the course of research on Orwell, Davison and Ian Angus found an agenda for a meeting of the Eastern Services Committee on 22nd October 1941, held in Room 101 at 55 Portland Place.<sup>13</sup> Orwell was an occasional member of that committee, which included representatives from the Ministry of Information and other government departments, and which supervised censorship within the Eastern Service.<sup>14</sup>

The situation of Room 101 at Broadcasting House also suggests that it had no specific connection to Orwell. It was at the north-east corner of the first floor, at the end of a long corridor beyond a goods lift (Fig.47). The first floor was mainly devoted to clerical activities: sorting mail, typing and filing. It was two floors below the Talks studios to which Orwell was attached. It is entirely possible that Room 101 was never a private office or conference room. The original floor plan shows that it contained



48. Interior of Room 101 at Broadcasting House prior to demolition. 2003. (Photograph by Jeremy Young).

part of a flight of stairs leading to the balcony of the Radio Theatre, the massive concert hall that was the centrepiece of Broadcasting House. Those stairs were removed in 1994.<sup>15</sup> The BBC's own plans show no indication that Room 101 was ever designated as an office.<sup>16</sup> It is difficult to identify the precise function of Room 101 in Orwell's day: in recent years, Room 101 housed parts of the building's plumbing and heating systems (Fig.48).

Although it was the supposed connection with Orwell that prompted Whiteread's involvement, her decision to cast the interior of the room also rested upon the physical condition of the room itself. By 2003 the interior walls were full of unfilled holes and unrepaired damage resulting from years of changes to the plumbing and ventilation systems (Fig.49). Damage to the fabric of the room increased as demolition crews tore pipes and ducts from the walls, leaving patches of exposed brick. By the time the room was empty, it contained little more than the accumulated evidence of heavy-handed alterations. Whiteread later compared the effect to bomb damage and noted that the development of the project coincided with the invasion of Iraq in March 2003.<sup>17</sup>

The condition of Room 101, and its general form, reflected its peripheral but distinctive place in an architectural scheme. The layout of Broadcasting House followed the constraints of the location and the stringent demands of broadcasting. The site

<sup>11</sup> R. Brooks: 'Orwell's room 101 to be work of art', *The Sunday Times* (23rd March 2003), p.14.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> P. Davison: 'George Orwell: Dates and Origins', *Library* 6, 13/2 (June 1991), pp.144–45.

<sup>14</sup> C. Fleay and M. Sanders: 'Looking into the Abyss: George Orwell at the BBC', *Journal of Contemporary History* 24 (1989), p.506; and J. Paczulla: "'Talking to India': George Orwell's Work at the BBC, 1941–1943", *Canadian Journal of History* 42 (spring-summer 2007), pp.60–61.

<sup>15</sup> CWPA, 'Heritage study volume 2' (16th November 2001), pp.28–29.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.20 and 57; see also plans in support of application.

<sup>17</sup> R. Whiteread in conversation with J. Tusa: *The John Tusa Interviews*, BBC Radio 3 (broadcast 4th January 2004); and R. Whiteread in J. Claypole: *The Real Room 101*, BBC Four (broadcast 14th July 2003).

<sup>18</sup> Heritage study cited at note 15 above, pp.15–16.

<sup>19</sup> R. Byron: 'Broadcasting House', *The Architectural Review* 72/429 (August 1932), p.47.

<sup>20</sup> Heritage study cited at note 15 above, pp.7 and 18. The studios on the upper



49. Interior of Room 101 at Broadcasting House prior to the casting of *Untitled (Room 101)*. 2003. (Photograph by Rachel Whiteread).



50. Installation view of *Untitled (Room 101)* in the Cast Courts of the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, showing the cast windows. 2003. (Photograph by Mike Bruce; courtesy of Gagosian Gallery, London).

called for rectilinear north and east elevations defined by neighbouring properties along Portland Place and the line of Langham Street respectively. The north elevation abutted buildings that the BBC rapidly acquired and demolished to make way for a planned extension to Broadcasting House, a project that ceased with the outbreak of the Second World War in September 1939.<sup>18</sup> The longest side of *Untitled (Room 101)* records the wall along this shared property line. That long, uninterrupted wall was an ideal location for the plant equipment that Room 101 eventually housed. The inset beside the door, which disrupts the rectangular perimeter of the sculpture, marks where a large duct ran from the basement to the third floor. The windows – the sole elements that might be described as decorative – possess Georgian proportions, which indicate a compromise between the design of the building and the tone of its environment (Fig. 50). In a special issue devoted to Broadcasting House soon after its completion, the *Architectural Review* characterised that compromise in more combative terms, as ‘a struggle between moribund traditionalism and inventive modernism’.<sup>19</sup>

The interior layout reflected the requirements of audio broadcasting. In order to insulate the studios from street noise, the plans called for several layers of acoustic protection. Each studio was enveloped in soundproofing; all the studios were contained within a brick tower that ran through the central core of the building; and a moat of corridors surrounded that core on most floors.<sup>20</sup> Offices and service functions ran around the periphery of the building. The central core at first-floor level contained the balcony of the Radio Theatre. Room 101 was about as physically removed from any recording space as was possible in Broadcasting House.<sup>21</sup> Unlike the other rooms on the predominantly clerical first floor, Room 101 did not primarily serve

the BBC. Room 101 served the building itself. Whiteread’s sculpture records the contours of architectural utility in a building renowned for elegant interiors (many of which succumbed to wartime damage and post-War alterations) and for details such as Eric Gill’s sculptures for the interior and exterior.

Whiteread and a team of three assistants began work in Room 101 in mid-April 2003 and finished six weeks later. Fifteen years of experience casting the boundaries of intangible volumes led her to use Jesmonite, a blend of plaster and acrylic resin. The room was cast in fifty-nine separate pieces that could be braced and bolted together to form a complete shell.<sup>22</sup> This differentiates *Untitled (Room 101)* from its formal precursor *Ghost* (Fig. 52), which was cast in plaster pieces that Whiteread then mounted on a steel armature. *Ghost* has no ceiling and does not fully enclose a volume.<sup>23</sup> Gaps between the sections of plaster allow the viewer to glimpse the interior.<sup>24</sup> The distinct elements that constitute *Untitled (Room 101)* are evident; in *Ghost*, they are pronounced. The surfaces are also quite different. Whereas *Untitled (Room 101)* looks achromic, *Ghost* is discoloured and stained. *Ghost* and *Untitled (Room 101)* belong to the same family of sculptures but their differences evince the development of Whiteread’s practice and the changing nature of architectural utility.

*Ghost* was formative and epiphanic for Whiteread. It led her to realise that she ‘could absolutely disorient the viewer’.<sup>25</sup> By inverting the relationship of mass and void, she also inverted the relationship between a container and what it contains. She has described the realisation that she had ‘become the wall’,<sup>26</sup> an observing surrogate for the physical boundary of interior space. The viewer, however, does not have the tactile relationship with the finished work that the artist enjoys. There is an isolating zone between viewer and object. This adds to the sense of

floors did not entirely follow this arrangement. The upper floors were abbreviated as a result of ‘rights of light’ provisions that required a steep mansard roof on the east side of the building. For recent commentary on the interior layout of Broadcasting House, see S. Ericson: ‘Death at Broadcasting House’, in A. Jansson and A. Lagerkvist, eds.: *Strange Spaces: Explorations into Mediated Obscurity*, Farnham 2009, pp.233–56.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.20 and 30; there were no studios on the second floor until 1972.

<sup>22</sup> RWS, component list and diagrams.

<sup>23</sup> I. Cole: ‘Mapping Traces: A Conversation with Rachel Whiteread’, *Sculpture* 23/3 (April 2004), p.41.

<sup>24</sup> R. Carley: ‘Domestic Afterlives: Rachel Whiteread’s “Ghost”’, *Architectural Design* 78/3 (May–June 2008), p.28.

<sup>25</sup> R. Whiteread in C. Houser: ‘If Walls Could Talk: An Interview with Rachel Whiteread’, in exh. cat. *Rachel Whiteread: Transient Spaces*, Berlin (Deutsche Guggenheim) 2001, p.52.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

disorientation and makes the details of common experience, such as the contours of a doorknob or window latch, crucial to the process of cognitive engagement with the work. *Ghost* unambiguously proclaims its origins in a room that had been routinely occupied before falling into disuse. The room was in a three-storey late Victorian house at 486 Archway Road, London N6 (Fig. 51), part of a terrace slated for demolition between 1976 and 1994 as part of a road-widening scheme that never happened.<sup>27</sup> Acme Housing Association Ltd., which specialises in providing affordable studios and accommodation for artists, managed the property. In 1990 they made it available to Whiteread, who rented a studio from Acme at the time.<sup>28</sup> *Ghost* is full of indexical clues to the history of the room, from the form of the picture rail and skirting board to the fireplace and the surrounding tiles. In addition, the plaster retains traces of the room's chemical history, with soot from the fireplace and the stains of nicotine and wallpaper paste.<sup>29</sup>

As with *House* (Fig. 54),<sup>30</sup> which earned Whiteread the 1993 Turner Prize and a barrage of public attention, *Ghost* has prompted a body of critical analysis that emphasises loss, nostalgia and the pathos of humble dwellings that fall into disuse. The title's implications of mortality and intangible presence have prompted comparisons to mausoleums, sepulchres and even spirit photography.<sup>31</sup> *House* and *Ghost* bore the impressions not only of form, but also of residue: particulate matter, chemical staining and other consequences of habitation that convey the past tense. In the case of *House*, however, any distinction between the embodied past and the exhibited present was moot. The site of casting and the site of display were one and the same. The vacant property at 193 Grove Road, London E3, was also a three-storey Victorian terraced house scheduled for demolition – in this case, to make way for an extension of Mile End Park (Fig. 53). James Lingwood of the Artangel Trust secured permission for Whiteread to cast the inside in concrete and dismantle the fabric of the building that enveloped it. The controversial decision of the London Borough of Tower Hamlets to demolish the work was disappointing but expected. *House* was always intended as a temporary piece, a quality that orients the work towards the vivid process of metamorphosis rather than the commemorative process through which markers and edifices become surrogates for the departed.

By the time Whiteread cast Room 101 at Broadcasting House, her approach had changed significantly. Some of the reasons for this were practical, including the need for greater resilience and stability than was possessed by the 'naively made and put



51. 486 Archway Road, London N6. c.1979. (Photograph by Mark Wainwright).

together' *Ghost*.<sup>32</sup> In subsequent works, panels are tightly aligned and the tops are closed. The interior within the shell is not visible. Whiteread also dispensed with the internal armature that holds *Ghost* together, turning instead to bolts and a modest amount of internal bracing. The most visible difference, the bright and untainted surface apparent in *Untitled (Room 101)*, results from the introduction of a blank release agent into the process. This allowed the textures of the original surfaces, such as damaged masonry (Fig. 55), to make their marks while preventing chemical pollutants such as nicotine or soot from discolouring the cast.<sup>33</sup> Whiteread had used a blank release agent for *Untitled (Apartment)* and *Untitled (Rooms)* (both 2001),<sup>34</sup> two groups of casts taken from areas of the building that now houses her studio. The building was originally a Baptist church, then a synagogue, and finally a warehouse.<sup>35</sup> It was bombed during the War, and two self-contained flats were subsequently built for the rabbi and the caretaker during the post-War period of austerity. The spartan rooms, with their strictly geometric windows,

<sup>27</sup> 'History 1972–1994', in *Acme. Studios for Artists*, London 1995, pp.15 and 18. Mark Wainwright and Richard Philpott occupied 486 Archway Road from 1978 to 1985. Philpott's documentary for Channel 4, *Road Movie* (1984), examined the proposed road-widening scheme and responses to it. *Ghost* was cast in one of Wainwright's former studios, a back room on the first (middle) floor of the house. I thank Mark Wainwright for this information.

<sup>28</sup> R. Whiteread in an interview dated 8th June 1990, in N.P. James and S.A. Batiste, ed.: *Interviews with the Artists. Elements of Discourse*, London 1996, p.98.

<sup>29</sup> *Ghost* was first exhibited at the Chisenhale Gallery, London (13th June to 17th July 1990). Its subsequent appearance at the Arnolfini Gallery, Bristol, earned Whiteread her first nomination for the newly reconstituted Turner Prize. The Turner Prize returned in 1991, after a one-year hiatus, with a new sponsor (Channel 4) and new rules. It was restricted to four short-listed artists under the age of fifty and was judged on the quality of exhibition during the preceding year. The 1991 prize went to Anish Kapoor.

<sup>30</sup> See the review by R. Shone: 'Rachel Whiteread's "House"', *THE BURLINGTON MAGAZINE* 135 (1993), pp.837–38.

<sup>31</sup> See, for example, Houser, *op. cit.* (note 25), p.52; Tusa, *op. cit.* (note 17); and A. Ferris: 'Disembodied Spirits: Spirit Photography and Rachel Whiteread's "Ghost"', *Art Journal* 62/3 (autumn 2003), pp.44–55.

<sup>32</sup> Houser, *op. cit.* (note 25), p.52.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p.53.

<sup>34</sup> *Untitled (Apartment)* is in the collection of the Guggenheim Museum, New York; *Untitled (Rooms)* is in the Tate collection.

<sup>35</sup> R. Whiteread quoted in L. Corrin: 'A Conversation with Rachel Whiteread, March 2001', in L. Corrin, P. Elliott and A. Schlieker: exh. cat. *Rachel Whiteread*, Edinburgh (Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art) and London (Serpentine Gallery) 2001, p.22.

<sup>36</sup> Houser, *op. cit.* (note 25), p.54.

<sup>37</sup> RWS, Lovell to Whiteread, 8th August 2003.

<sup>38</sup> RWS, Robert Seatter (BBC) to Whiteread, 29th May 2003.

<sup>39</sup> London, Victoria and Albert Museum, Rachel Whiteread, *Untitled (Room 101)* file, (hereafter R W/V. & A.), Lovell to Mark Jones (V. & A.), 15th September 2003.

<sup>40</sup> R W/V. & A., Seatter to Sarah McCormack (V. & A.), 13th October 2003.

recalled *Untitled (Room)*, Whiteread's contribution to the 1993 Turner Prize exhibition. That sculpture did not originate in an existing dwelling but in a plywood form constructed solely for the purpose of casting 'a generic space'.<sup>36</sup> The surface of *Untitled (Room)*, however, has variegated brown tones lifted from the plywood. The casts from the self-contained flats, on the other hand, are more or less devoid of tonal contrast.

That lack of tone, together with the dour geometry of the rooms and their details, calls to mind the formal distillation of Minimalism at extremes that it seldom approached. The crucial difference is that Whiteread's works always retain implications of physical engagement: points of contact, indicators of human scale or evidence of the way things are handled. That principle persists throughout the body of works that represent the interiors of rooms, as do the connotations of different architectural styles and purposes, and the shifts of tense and of aspect – of temporal situation and direction – that different casting conditions record in different ways. Seen from that perspective, *Untitled (Room 101)* possesses a Janus-faced air of transition. Its source was a room in an inter-War building that blended tradition with modernity, a room fit for occasional rather than habitual occupancy.

The BBC failed to locate a suitable permanent site for *Untitled (Room 101)*.<sup>37</sup> It was also unable to exhibit the sculpture but instead expressed support 'for siting in a public venue',<sup>38</sup> an attitude consistent with its Public Art Plan. In September 2003 Vivien Lovell approached the Victoria and Albert Museum on behalf of the BBC Public Art Group to discuss the possibility of exhibiting the sculpture there, noting that 'the BBC would wish to launch its Public Art Programme at the same time'.<sup>39</sup> The BBC agreed to pay for the costs of transporting and installing the work. The V. & A., for its part, provided 'substantial support in kind': staff time; use of facilities for the private view on 14th November; and use of a lecture theatre by the Radio 3 magazine programme *Nightwaves*, which broadcast a discussion of public art on the same day.<sup>40</sup> The exhibition opened to the public on 15th November. Some photographs by John Riddy, showing Room 101 after Whiteread had finished casting it, were on display in the gallery above the Cast Courts until the end of 2003.

*Untitled (Room 101)* was placed near the south wall of Room 46b, the Italian Cast Court. Whiteread supervised the installation and directed the rearrangement of thirteen works in the vicinity.<sup>41</sup> The appearance of *Untitled (Room 101)* amid casts of artefacts from the Renaissance was sudden and dissonant. 'In this context', Whiteread noted at the time, 'my work looks like the Tardis has landed'.<sup>42</sup> In the long-lived BBC television series

<sup>41</sup> RW/V. & A., Technical Services requisition, 1st October 2003. The following casts, identified by their inventory numbers, were moved: REPRO.1872–62, the Bruges Madonna; REPRO.1872–430, candelabrum from Chester Cathedral; REPRO.1885–198, bust of Bartolommeo Colleoni; REPRO.1888.519, *Putto with fish*; REPRO.1899–55, *David with the head of Goliath*; REPRO.1863–2, socket for a standard, from the Piazza di S. Marco, Venice; REPRO.1890–5, bust of Francesco di Tommaso Sassetti; REPRO.1864–15, bust of Filippo Strozzi; REPRO.1899–57, bust of Piero di Cosimo de' Medici; REPRO.1889–91, bust of a young woman; REPRO.1867–181, bust of a man; REPRO.1884–298, *Crouching boy*; and REPRO.1882–238, *Persus with the head of Medusa*. A similar but slightly inaccurate list appears in Carley, *op. cit.* (note 1), p.21, note 28. Carley's list incorrectly identifies REPRO.1899–55 as the cast of Michelangelo's *David* (REPRO.1857–161) rather than the cast of Verrocchio's *David with the head of Goliath*. That was moved; the cast of Michelangelo's *David* was not.

<sup>42</sup> Cork, *op. cit.* (note 1), p.98. The quotations first appeared in Cork's review of the V. & A. installation: *idem*: 'Inside-out nightmare', *The Times* (17th December 2003). The essay in the Bregenz catalogue is a revised and expanded version of the *Times* review.



52. *Ghost*, by Rachel Whiteread. 1990. Plaster on steel frame, 269 by 355.5 by 317.5 cm. (National Gallery of Art, Washington; photograph by Mike Bruce; courtesy of Gagosian Gallery, London).



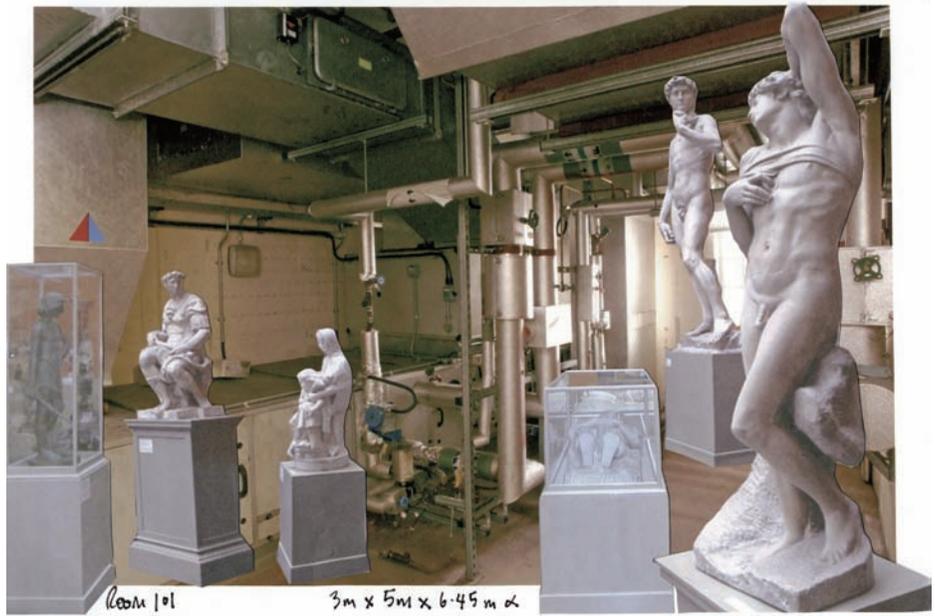
53. 193 Grove Road, London E3, prior to the casting of *House*. 1993. (Photograph by John Davies).



54. *House*, by Rachel Whiteread. 1993, demolished 1994. Concrete. (Photograph by John Davies).



55. Detail of Fig.46 showing damaged masonry. (Photograph by Mike Bruce; courtesy of Gagosian Gallery, London).



56. *Untitled (Room 101)*, by Rachel Whiteread. 2003. Collage, 29.7 by 42 cm. (Courtesy of the artist).

*Doctor Who*, the Tardis is a deceptively voluminous vehicle for travel through space and time, a feat which leads to its sudden appearance in all manner of incongruous situations. It externally resembles a police box of a type that Gilbert MacKenzie Trench designed for the Metropolitan Police in 1929,<sup>43</sup> just as Val Myer's proposed design for Broadcasting House was evolving.<sup>44</sup>

Whiteread's casual witticism captured the sense of anachronism and spatial disorder that her sculpture emphasised, but that sense already existed. The cast collection at the V. & A. includes copies of small busts, reliefs, monumental sculpture and architectural details, the common traits of which reside in art-historical generalities such as period, medium and style rather than in specific locations or coherent spatial relationships. The Cast Courts are an instructive repository of exemplars that bolster a tradition held in common and taken on trust. *Untitled (Room 101)* openly challenged the conventions of sculptural appearance that surrounded it, even as it represented a variation on the physical process that made the Cast Courts possible in the first place. Whiteread's work took the process of casting and turned it into the primary object, thus inverting the relative value of cast and original. Moreover, her work adjusted the role of the viewer in relation to sculpture and architecture until the customary distinctions of observation and spatial occupancy – of 'being outside' and 'being inside' – evaporated. A collage by Whiteread conveys the spatial and temporal reorganisation that her sculpture would imply once it stood in the Cast Court (Fig. 56).

The uncertain scale of the work contributed to the sense of disorientation. The relationship between the scale of Room 101 and the rest of Broadcasting House had been concealed by the nature of architectural interiors, which are seldom apprehended

concurrently with the building as a whole. In Whiteread's studio, the cast of Room 101 had occupied much of the space. It seemed enormous there, even though the scale of the cast and the studio were rather close. In the Cast Court, which is seven times as high as *Untitled (Room 101)*, the relative scale of a room and a building was strikingly apparent (Fig. 57).

The exhibition was due to close on 27th June 2004 but Whiteread's sculpture remained in place until 28th July.<sup>45</sup> It attracted healthy attendance and a scattering of negative comments.<sup>46</sup> A condition assessment prior to returning the sculpture noted some minor and easily repaired damage, mainly scuff marks from shoes.<sup>47</sup> This was the result of a Wodehousian publicity stunt in which readers of the *Chap* – a humorous magazine that embraces the aesthetic and social codes of an idealised pre-War gentry – handcuffed themselves around (or at least in front of) *Untitled (Room 101)* and then climbed on top of it. Guards monitored the situation and waited for them to descend without confrontation.<sup>48</sup> The stunt was little more than an uninspired (but nattily attired) protest against contemporary art that avoids superficial emulation of past styles. Nonetheless, it further exemplified the pervasive sense of anachronism that attended the sculpture, the quality that gives it a complicated and unsettling relationship with the position and direction of time. As a cast of an architectural feature, the sculpture belonged in the Cast Courts typologically. Its shortage of decorative flourishes or clues to its place in the history of design, however, placed it at odds with the other forms in the room. Whereas *Ghost* might conceivably have gained acceptance through its mild hints of domesticated Victorian classicism, *Untitled (Room 101)* seemed as anonymous and parenthetically qualified as the title of the work suggests.

<sup>43</sup> I. Burton: 'A History of the Police Box', *Construction History Society Newsletter* 75 (November 2006), pp.2–5.

<sup>44</sup> Discussions over appropriate solutions to the 'rights of light' problem, mentioned in note 20 above, continued throughout 1928 and into 1929; Heritage study cited at note 15 above, p.7.

<sup>45</sup> RW/V. & A., Neville Redvers-Mutton (Momart) to McCormack, 20th July 2004.

<sup>46</sup> RW/V. & A., visitors' comments.

<sup>47</sup> RW/V. & A., condition statement, entry dated 27th July 2004.

<sup>48</sup> There is some uncertainty regarding the number of protestors. The organisers claimed twenty-seven participants but the V. & A.'s notes on the incident put the



57. Installation view of *Untitled (Room 101)* at the V. & A. 2003. (Photograph by Mike Bruce; courtesy of Gagosian Gallery, London).

Whiteread was ambivalent about the title from the outset and 'wondered whether to call it "Room 101" at all'.<sup>49</sup> She avoided using materials and surface effects to suggest the ominous connotations that attend Orwell's description of Room 101. The supposed connection to Orwell, however, held an irresistible allure for the institutions associated with the project. The display text in the Cast Court described the sculpture as 'an imprint of the office George Orwell was said to have occupied at the BBC during the Second World War'.<sup>50</sup> After Peter Davison wrote to the V. & A. in response to Richard Cork's review in *The Times* and set out the case against that account,<sup>51</sup> there was some discussion of alternative wording such as '... the office that George Orwell was once thought to have used at the BBC'.<sup>52</sup> The more tenuous the connection, the greater the need to qualify the relationship between truth and legend.

Despite her doubts about the title, Whiteread did detect something Orwellian about the sculpture and the anonymous, utilitarian, fraying room that served as its mould. There are plenty of salient themes in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, such as the cynical manipulation of warfare for public consumption, or the austere conditions of Winston Smith's office in the Ministry of



58. *Untitled (Room 101)* in the exhibition *Rachel Whiteread: Walls, Doors, Floors and Stairs* at Kunsthau Bregenz. 2005. (Photograph by Markus Tretter).

Truth, and living quarters in Victory Mansions. Whether or not a specific notion comes to mind, *Untitled (Room 101)* stands as evidence of the physical realm that conditioned Orwell's analyses of English life. That physical realm – by turns grandiose and humble, noble and decrepit – continues to define a national aesthetic consensus that favours anachronism in the built environment. It is fitting that the sole British exhibition to date of *Untitled (Room 101)* took place amid formal exemplars whose commonality rests not on stylistic or physical consonance, but on a remembered sense of cultural inheritance and continuity.

*Untitled (Room 101)* has twice been exhibited with other works by Whiteread. It appeared at Kunsthau Bregenz, where it had the third floor to itself (Fig. 58), and in a 2007 solo exhibition in Málaga.<sup>53</sup> In 2009 it joined the collection of the Centre Georges Pompidou, where it is currently on display in the exhibition *elles@centrepompidou* (to 21st February 2011). The Centre Pompidou, with its exposed pipes and systems running along the ceilings and walls, is an intriguing setting for a sculpture that came from a pipe-filled room. This happy alliance of object and setting emphasises the reordering of spatial conventions in architecture and sculpture that *Untitled (Room 101)* makes real. It is nonetheless significant that a sculpture by a leading British artist, cast directly from a cherished London landmark that houses a renowned institution, and leavened by an enigmatic connection to a great English writer, found no home in Britain. Fortunately, *Untitled (Room 101)* has sufficient presence and endurance to preserve its own heritage. Its material facts are substitutes for obliterated space, tenuous allusions and a recent past that prompts ambivalence rather than affection. Those intangibles, which vanish so easily from the common memory, remain encoded in the sculpture as it passes from its place of origin to its place in history.

number at ten; see Carley, *op. cit.* (note 1), p.23; and RW/V. & A., undated notes.

<sup>49</sup> Whiteread quoted in Cork, *op. cit.* (note 1), p.97.

<sup>50</sup> RW/V. & A., exhibition text.

<sup>51</sup> RW/V. & A., Peter Davison to the Director (V. & A.), 24th January 2004.

<sup>52</sup> RW/V. & A., Charlotte Mullins to McCormack, 1st March 2004.

<sup>53</sup> The exhibitions were *Rachel Whiteread. Walls, Doors, Floors and Stairs* at Kunsthau Bregenz (9th April to 29th May 2005); and *Rachel Whiteread* at the Centro de Arte Contemporáneo, Málaga (25th May to 26th August 2007). Catalogues accompanied both exhibitions: Schneider, *op. cit.* (note 1); and F. Francés *et al.*: exh. cat. *Whiteread*, Málaga (Centro de Arte Contemporáneo) 2007.