# ANTONY GORMLEY

*INTERVIEW WITH KEITH BALL*

From 'Intimate Architecture - Antony Gormley', EVERYTHING, no. 13, London, April/May, 1994

Can we talk about the work you showed in the old prison buildings in Charleston, because I think there's an interesting link with some of the work in the Tate. In Charleston you seemed to have created a kind of narrative with the work that's played out as you move from one part of the building to another.

AG: It's not a narrative in the normal sense, but I think what I think it is a kind of system of co-ordinates that runs through the show which is also true in Malmo and is kind of true at the Tate, but it doesn't work.

KB: Because of the relationship of the spaces to one another?

AG: Yes, what I love most is when there is a sense of an architectural structure which has within it notions of opposition. In Ireland it's going to be wonderful because we're going to have this hundred-and-eighty-foot-long corridor with FIELD in it, and next to that will be a series of seven rooms that will each have one object in them. So you've got two notions of passage, one which you can't enter at all and can only penetrate visually and which is completely filled with one work, and the other where you go through a succession of rooms. In a sense that's another notion of co-ordinates. You're experiencing the same space but in two different ways. But you were talking about Charleston which was an absolutely wonderful experience, it was a real opening up, it was the first time that I'd managed to show the wider implications of the work.

KB: In a sense that was what I was trying to get at when I talked about a narrative. It seems to me that earlier works were almost like isolated incidents that in Charleston were kind of tied together.

AG: Well, it wasn't about tying it together, it was just setting up different energies or different kinds of vibration in every space.

I think that the point for me about how work is placed is that there has to be, and this is as true for the individual body cases as it is for collective work and works that have more than one element, there has to be a relationship with the space in which they are shown. There's a sense in which the object either displaces the space as with the new solid iron works, or contains space which has been true of all of the body cases. There has to be a tension between the two. Now that tension has changed radically with this evolution to solid body forms from body cases. You can see it in Testing a World View, the kind of wanting to be in the space in the same way as a real person would be isn't there any more. I've tried to admit to the inertia of the works and make them in another way, and that's a very different game to the kind of central placing where the axiality of the work is picked up on the axiality of the space.

KB: The thing about the relationships between the work and the space in Charleston is the conscious introduction of still other elements. You made a decision to remove the glass from the windows which allowed the outside to come in via sound, birdsong, breeze etc., and all of this in addition to removing any artificial light which allowed the changing day-light to alter the space, added a strong sense of time to the work. Now, presumably that sense of time would be diminished if the work was shown elsewhere and without those conditions.

AG: Are you asking how site specific the work is?

KB: Not really, I'm trying to get to this thing about how the work progresses, and this is where I'm making the link with the concrete blocks at the Tate, IIMMERSION HOME OF THE HEART, and the others in that series. These works seem to me to contain all of the elements of the Charleston exhibition, they contain those spatial questions and that sense of time which you "imported" as it were at Charleston.

Because I read the works at Charleston as this kind of narrative, the block works appear almost like a kind of summary to that exhibition. A kind of concise version.

AG: Yes, I think that's a very nice way of putting it because I think that the blocks are concentrated architectural space and do talk about the way in which, by being animals who choose to live in boxes, we are kind of aware explicitly or implicitly of testing ourselves against these environments. I think that architecture is another kind of body, it's another container.

KB: Which was always the thing about the body cases, the idea of the space within the space.

AG: Yes, absolutely, they were a kind of intimate architecture. It's interesting because the reason that I didn't make the block works for so long was because I thought that they were too obvious. It was only when I made the first one that I realised that perhaps they weren't. I had thought that they were like object lessons of my particular concerns, and yet in some curious way I think that they actually did something that I wasn't aware of, which is more to do with freedom than containment, and that's simply to do with the clarity by which substance becomes space and space becomes substance in the work . When I talk to people about those works they have a tendency to say "Oh, very dark" or "Mafia envelope" stuff, but when you actually see them... I think they are incredibly sublime, very quiet, extremely contained.

KB: But they're both things, aren't they? There is a sort of parallel with Michelangelo's slaves, but whereas those works deal with a perpetual heroic struggle to free the body, your figures are absent from a situation which has been erected around them. They are free but also impossibly so.

AG: The first question that is usually asked about them is "How did you get out?" which is a child's question, which is why it's so important, and of course the truth is that I didn't get out because I was never in there as I was in the body cases. But I think that the fundamental difference between these pieces and Michelangelo's is a philosophical difference. I've been accused recently, in Sweden of reiterating the idea of the human mind as being a kind of spark of some sort of ideal mind which has become hopelessly trapped within the morass of the material world. I absolutely reject that reading, because I think that kind of idealistic philosophy is just not helpful and one ends up in the melancholy of being trapped in the body - the body

as womb, as tomb and all of that stuff. Now, that is the position of the Michelangelo, this physical, spiritual struggle for release from the shackles of the body. I believe that my concrete pieces, whilst containing that sinister element, also speak about acceptance. They are accepting and touching their condition in the world.

KB: They are about being there.

AG: Well, you can read them as tombs, but they are also a celebration of life. They are about the widest possible evocation of sense, that being a union of sensation and intelligence, they accept the condition of being in the body as a point of potential, a point of power..... Now, as soon as I say that, of course I am aware of the paradox because the body is not actually there in these works, but you know where it was or should be. They are perfect housings for the body.

KB: So the more relevant question could be "How do you get in?" rather than "How do you get out?".

AG: They're about experiencing freedom by knowing one's intimate relationship with one's environment, knowing where one fits, comfortably, perfectly. Finding that place through experiencing it fully is what people find so difficult.

KB: Do you think that difficulty comes from the belief that our real understanding of the world is language-led, that language is our prime tool rather than experience and that somehow we can only fully know and fully participate with life once we have named its constituent parts?

AG: Yes, it's extraordinary how that idea has caught on isn't it ? I think that Wittgenstein is to blame for a lot of that, or at least some misinterpretations of Wittgenstein. It's absolutely extraordinary to think that language comes first. Life is such an exhilarating thing in its self, I mean if you swim, the water, the sensation, it must be primary .

KB: You know it's wet before you know that what it's called is "wet", language can only follow experience in order to approximate it and attempt to share it.

AG: We seem to have got locked into this thing of secondary experience, the idea that we can know that which has been dissected elsewhere before it reaches us. What you get is received knowledge, a result of external analysis. I really do think that there is an extraordinary neglect of the importance of primary experience. I think that we're not going to go any further down this line ideologically or philosophically.

The thing that has propelled western culture is the idea that human intelligence separates us from the natural world, and that human intelligence requires of us that we use our discriminating and analytical powers to give names to everything and to discover the discrete functionings of things, the agenda being that eventually we'll be able to kind of get in there and be able to control it all.

The whole idea about manipulating the world necessitates an idea that you can be in a position to control, which in turn means that you must be apart from.

There is of course a necessary element of that involved in producing a piece of work which attempts to build up an opposite set of values which are about being a part of. So the paradox runs throughout both the intention of the work and the process of making it. I think that this work is very romantic in many senses because it's trying to redefine human nature within nature.

KB: You've been accused throughout your career of the exact opposite. Your work has constantly been read as being about alienation and I know that you've always rejected that. FIELD however has been far more easily accepted. Do you think that this is to do with the dynamic which was previously set up (in the body cases) between one physically isolated piece and the viewer, the one-to-one relationship, which has in a very major way been removed in FIELD? FIELDallows the viewer literally an access to a wider picture .

AG: I've always wanted the work to be more reflective. I've always wanted the audience to kind of participate in that way, but I think a lot of people haven't even wanted to participate because they have felt alienated.

KB: But you think that's about their own alienation rather than any alienation in the work?

AG: Yes, I think.... Yes, I don't want to throw back the accusation, but I think that might well be true. It struck me in Liverpool. You get all this work that deals with solitary experience in one half of the exhibition and suddenly the other half is about community and about being faced with a collective expression. I think you've put it very well. I think there is a theatrical aspect to FIELD which makes it easier to relate to - it's a big picture. Also, although all of my work has always been collectively made - FIELD is a particularly spectacular example of working with others who perhaps had a more personal engagement with the work. That seems to be reflected in a more personal engagement with and attitude to the outcome of the work. But also I think that for most people it's easier to engage with things that are kind of cute. There is a cuteness about FIELD.

---