

# ANTONY GORMLEY

## STILL MOVING (EXTRACTS)

From an address to the 'Art and Spirituality' conference, Durham Cathedral, October 1996. Revised 2000.

What is the difference between our experience of time now and that of twenty-five years ago? I feel that today we are in a state of movement in spite of ourselves, and perhaps we are more aware now of being a subject who is moved, rather than an active participant who is moving [...] The most profound and appropriate monument that we are bequeathing to the future is undoubtedly our network of motorways and roads that speak of restlessness. They are the creation of a time in which an ever greater taste for mobility has perhaps been the most constant feature of life.

Paul Virilio writes eloquently about his current condition of *déplacement*, and sees this mirrored in the way in which the place of inscription of art has itself become more and more mobile [...] I want to ask whether it is possible for art to resist the flow of displacement by creating places - works that answer a need for shared experience that is not 'religious' in the conventional sense but invite those experiencing them to reflect on their own purpose.

Can we use the space of art for communion? A contact not only between ourselves but between ourselves and history? In doing this can we also derive the energy necessary to believe in our part in the construction of the future? Is it possible for art to provide a space that can be regenerative? Is it possible to use the space of art to resist this restlessness, this sense of fragmentation, this sense of alienation from self and from place?

My feeling is that in spite of our mobility and that of contemporary visual media, and perhaps because of these things, we still yearn to see within the built environment, within the agricultural environment that surrounds it and even in the less touched, natural environment, something that connects with our deepest fears and our most profound hopes. What has happened with collective expression exercised in collective space (particularly in Europe between 1903 and 1940 and in the former Soviet Union for much longer) is that the creative need expressed in the stone avenues and circles or megalithic cultures or in the gothic cathedrals of Europe has been subverted by totalitarian political use. I think that there is not a great distinction here between the legacy of hundreds of tons of bronze empress/goddesses from the Indian Raj and the monuments of Stalinism, National Socialism and Fascism. They all subverted a natural desire within humankind to make creative changes to their environment so that it could act as a witness to their lives, serving as an energiser, focus, resonator, extending the imaginative into the physical and vice-versa. This is the impulse behind the megalithic monuments and even the cathedrals: a collective endeavour addressing sidereal time with an object that is also a location, made of stone or some enduring material; an object that exists beyond the span of a human life. From this place (for it is important that it be a place as well as an object) we can project into the time to come.

It is more important to respond to this yearning now than at any other time. Virilio may be right that the technology of the virtual world of TV and the internet is making the production and reception of the work of art practically synchronic and completely displaced. Yet I think there is a necessary resistance to this, which reinforces the primary experience in the body that the virtual world is constantly trying to leave behind. I don't want you to think that I am anything but excited by the implications of the Internet. The Internet, for better or worse, is an objectification of Teilhard de Chardin's idea of the communion of human mind - the noosphere, which is the third encirclement of the globe, the first being the biosphere and the second the atmosphere. With this possibility of instant communication, created by a non-space that is everywhere, the idea of place becomes very important. It can be reinforced by the continuation of a collective art that in some way places human being in a much wider context. I say collective art not because I am arguing for a community art project as it has come to be understood since the 1960s but one that comes from a collective will to make 'a landmark'. This should be seen as the fulfilment of the movement in the late 1960s and 1970s in which artists went 'out into the wilderness' to make works that were 'essential' and escape the commodification of the market.

In philosophical terms, I think what I'm proposing is to return to the rootedness of Heidegger in order to contravene the deconstructive principles of Baudrillard. In 'The Origin of the Work of Art' Heidegger describes the Classical Greek temple as a form of paradigm for the collective expression of a people in a place.

*'A building, a Greek temple, portrays nothing. It simply stands there in the middle of the rock cleft valley. The building encloses the figure of the God and, in this concealment, lets it stand out into the holy precinct through the open portico. By means of the temple the God is present in the temple. This presence of the God is in itself the extension and the limitation of the precinct as a holy precinct. The temple and its precinct, however do not fade away into the indefinite. It is the temple work that first fits together and at the same time gathers around itself the unity of those paths and relations in which birth and death, disaster and blessing, victory and disgrace, endurance and decline, acquire the shape of destiny for human beings.'*

I am interested in reviving this idea of presence. Can we have presence without the God? Can we resurrect the monument without bringing the shadow of bad history? The idea of an image that is open enough to be interpreted widely, that has multiple and generative potential for meaning but is strong enough to be a focus. How do we construct such an image? In its being someone's can it become everyone's? It has seemed for quite a long time obvious to me that the body can represent at the present time what abstraction did at the beginning of the twentieth century. That is, the ground on which all the seeds of emancipated identity are to grow: the last frontier, the inner realm. (Space has been probed but what do we really know of the body's darkness.) The body, not as an object of idealisation that should be forced to carry allegorical, symbolic or dramatic readings, but the body as a place. The body not as hero or as sexual object, but the body in some way as the collective subjective - the place where we all live. The place on which the pressures of society are inscribed and out of which expression, language, feeling can come.

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