ANTONY GORMLEY

MAARETTA JAUKURRI - BEING, LOOKING, MEETING WITH OTHERS

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I am aboard an early morning flight bound for London. I am on my way to meet Antony Gormley, to view his latest sculptures and discuss his forthcoming exhibition in Stockholm. On the flight I find myself contemplating how his entire oeuvre takes its cue from the human body, not only in terms of scale, volume and proportions, but also its affective content. I also find myself thinking about how his art has evolved over the years - how it reaches out and touches people, both his sculptures and his participatory projects, in which he activates viewers to realise their own visions by offering a context and tools, and then relinquishing all further artistic control. His best-known works in this genre include FIELD (1989-2003), a series of clay installations featured in different continents, CLAY AND THE COLLECTIVE BODY (2009), another clay project carried out in Helsinki, and ONE & OTHER, a Fourth Plinth Commission staged outdoors in London's Trafalgar Square in 2009. The connecting thread between these works is the steadily growing degree of freedom that Gormley gives the viewer in the spaces and situations he creates. Whereas the human figure was the recognisable subject of the FIELD installations, CLAY AND THE COLLECTIVE BODY consisted purely of clay and empty space. Going one step further in London, with ONE & OTHER, Gormley literally lifted members of the public onto a pedestal by inviting them to stage performances to passers-by whilst perched atop the vacant fourth plinth in Trafalgar Square. This part of his oeuvre seems to crystallise another aspect of Gormley's work, of how to engage the viewer's body and mind in new possibilities of being present.

I next find myself contemplating his large-scale projects which enfold spaces of such vast dimensions as to engage not only people, but the entire surrounding landscape and natural or built environment. Among the latest examples is MODEL (2012), an indoor installation, where the viewer/experiencer enters a labyrinthine architectural construct derived from a scan of the artist's prone body, uncannily resembling an urban space. The scale of its various chambers expands and contracts, heightening the viewer/experiencer's body awareness and affective response to the space. Light and darkness alternate, just as they do in lived life - Gormley has in fact remarked on the infinite, dark space that unfolds whenever we close our eyes.

There is something touching about Gormley's solitary human figures temporarily planted in the middle of busy cityscapes, often at an inaccessible height far above the moreor- less ordered world of human-made form. In contexts of such great scale, the figures seem miniscule, lost and lonely, despite the panoramic scenery we might envisage them as enjoying. They seem vulnerable and at the mercy of the environment and elemental forces. These solitary figures also comment on one of Gormley's current preoccupations: the population explosion, the push for high-density urban development, and the altered physical and mental environment we are increasingly forced to inhabit.

Seated in the aircraft, I think about the rigorously standardised cabin space - the seating seems claustrophobically cramped, even for a relatively small person such as myself, if not physically, then at least psychologically. This of course depends on who one's neighbour happens to be, or, more pertinently, their size. Our ability to relate spontaneously to an 'Other' whose presence feels too intimately close is challenged in such situations. How are these standardised dimensions calculated? Who decides how long our legs or broad our shoulders are supposed to be? These mundane thoughts cross many minds in similar situations, but now, on the way to Gormley's studio, they seem so apposite and inescapable, begging a further question: how much living space per capita will we be deemed as needing in the future, when our cities are populated by billions?

Gormley's earliest works were plaster moulds taken of his own body. These early pieces were, in essence, plaster-cast documents of his body and its postures - or what Gormley has described as an ephemeral moment immortalised in material form. He still uses body moulding as a method of constructing spaces, affective responses and encounters, though his recent sculptures deploy sophisticated digital technology. As featured in a recent TV documentary, Gormley captures a split-second impression of his body using a three-dimensional digital scanner, with thousands of floating pixels delineating the contours of his body and its chosen posture at that given moment. (1)

Using this digital scanning method, Gormley has created a palm-sized miniature sculpture of himself in a more elaborate pose than would be possible to hold when taking a plaster mould. The miniature seated figure is anatomically naturalistic, even vaguely reminiscent of Socialist Realism's 'hero of labour'. For Gormley, however, the tiny sculpture was merely a playful experiment with the opportunities offered by new technology - indeed his newest thematic interest is how digital data can be translated into a wholly new vocabulary of form.

What we see in Gormley's latest works are not conventional sculptures of the human figure, but rather 'human architecture' constructed of metal blocks of varying sizes and shapes, some open and some closed. Immersion in a tank of tannic acid allows an orange rust to turn charcoal black and endows their surface with a velvety texture, as if inviting us to touch them. If taking a plaster body was for Gormley an act of capturing an ephemeral moment, the boundless adaptability of new digital technology opens up a wholly new temporal plane in his art - only in the presence of the viewer does the moment come alive.

Gormley's works, both past and present, are never confined to just one method, material or vocabulary. His basic syntax is consistent, both in its materials and imagery, but he uses that syntax to construct a variety of different fusions and permutations. It is as though Gormley's oeuvre is a compendium of sentences all sharing a common grammar. His art has a language all its own - it speaks 'Gormley'. Here, indeed, is one of the quintessential characteristics of his art. Years ago, he once said: 'The viewer is the subject of my sculptures. Our bodies connect us to the universe. It is no longer valid to speak of what separates us from them.' (2) The 'them' in Gormley's thinking includes the whole universe, not just other humans. He says that he means all 'bodies in space' - in the Newtonian sense.

In light of the identity debate that has been raging for decades, Gormley's statement from nearly twenty years ago seems refreshingly open-minded and forward-thinking. Nothing foreordains the course of our personal narrative, not gender, age, race or nationality. Gormley's art is not about encounters between two identities or a meeting of two narratives and their mutual resonances. His sculptures register a lived moment, but when the viewer comes face to face with the work, an entirely new moment is born. This encounter is central to Gormley's art, creating a wholly new space and a unique instant in time. We are allowed to keep our secrets and yet to connect with a fellow human being's emotions, which are affectively expressed by the sculpture's postures. We are thus brought together in a moment of sharing a new experience. Thus a sculpture can be the catalyst for a realised 'present time' which new thoughts and feelings engender. It is an experience that is here and now and it is unique for each of us.

Though Gormley uses sophisticated technology in his art, what he creates is not geometry, but an anatomically accurate three-dimensional representation of a living human form. 'We start with the translation from thousands of points on the surface that map it precisely, and then translate it into these very crude blocks. There is a huge amount of interpretation, and we make many models to then test the way the ensemble works. Every single block - in relation to how far out it cantilevers above the one below, where it sits generally in relation to the whole and its neighbours - is up for revision.' (3)

Gormley translates pixel maps into geometrical shapes, blocks, cubes and polygons, yet the resultant structure retains the recognisable contours, proportions and volume of the human figure and the emotive element captured in its posture. These emotions are conveyed to us in a highly reductive, intensified form, with a discernible performative element - when posing, the artist identifies wholly with the emotions expressed by his pose. With his early body moulds, the original pose and the final sculpture were identical, but with digital technology, Gormley is now able to experiment with boundless formal permutations. He defines this crucial change in his art as follows: 'When making the plaster moulds and casts, I was very concerned to avoid interpretable gesture and where I used extended limbs (as in the lead body-case works from the mid- 1980s), I was keen that they were ambiguous. I always intended that the pieces evoked a state of being over doing. With the advent of fast turnaround digital registration, I am now able to interpret the affordances of an emergent built structure, whether polygonal, cubic or framed, and respond by attempting to actually speak that language in my body posture. This is a case of feedback that is only possible with the very latest evolution of our ability to dip in and out of the digital, and respond to the built models in the moment of scanning. There is therefore an acceleration in the development of posture and the works themselves are links in a developmental loop'. (4)
To Gormley, sculptures are instruments rather than images or representations in the conventional sense. They are based on meticulous calculations which he translates into the language of art - into forms and spaces, into space-creating and space-defining elements, into new geometries made possible by modern digital technology, but he does so 'Other-wise', in ways not possible using traditional techniques of moulding and massing. What we see in Gormley's new sculptures mirrors the phenomenological branch of geometry, or what is defined as the 'geometry of living'. According to Edmund Husserl, '…what is real is in fact the lived everyday experience of space and that Euclid's abstract figures, far from giving the "real" basis of that experience, are only something derived from it for certain purposes'. (5) This idea of everyday lived experience as the real basis of geometrical form can be traced all the way back to Plato. With Gormley, however, modern digital technology brings about a reversal of this notion. He translates precise digital measurements into an intuitive vocabulary of form that bends to the artist's will and creative vision.

Alfred North Whitehead has pondered issues of geometry in relation to processes or states of 'becoming'. Intuitive, informal 'geometries of becoming' have in fact been an enduring source of fascination for many artists. One example cited by John Rajchman is the 'literature of fluidity and movement' inspired by the thinking of philosophers such as Henri Bergson and his American philosopher friend William James. (6) This led to the early experiments of the stream-of consciousness technique as exemplified by Virginia Woolf in her novel 'Mrs Dalloway': 'That she held herself well was true; and had nice hands and feet; and dressed well, considering that she spent little. But often now this body she wore (she stopped to look at a Dutch picture), this body, this body with all its capacities, seemed nothing - nothing at all. She had the oddest sense of being herself invisible; unseen; unknown; there being no more marrying, no more having children now, but only this astonishing and rather solemn progress with the rest of them, up Bond Street, this being Mrs Dalloway; not even Clarissa any more; this being Mrs Richard Dalloway.' (7) The text presents a moment of internal monologue and understanding of one's state, stature and moment in life, while on the other hand being physically situated in a real-life occupation of walking down the street to buy flowers for her evening party. Here, too, we are dealing with a particular type of translation - a paraphrasing of things 'Other-wise' in an entirely new form or context.

'Geometry of living' is a key concept in architecture and urban planning, where it serves as a guiding principle in the design of housing, buildings and cities. It has essentially been a critique of the 'abstract space' propagated by modernist architecture. (8) It seems that Gormley increasingly conceives his art, if not as pure architecture, then at least as an encounter between a physical human presence, corporeal architecture and the built environment or more precisely in the artist's own words: 'I am increasingly interested in the tropes of framing, containing and constructing being freed from architecture's shelter function. I want to make a psychological architecture that allows volume, light and acoustic resonance free play in the spaces that become places in an adventure in real time.' (9)

The classic problem associated with the geometry of living concerns the philosophical concept of autrui, or the Other. Gilles Deleuze has defined the Other's relationship with geometry as follows: '…the other is the "expression of a possible world" that does not exist outside the expression - that of a frightened face, for example.' (10)

'The problem is then one of the body, its modes of spatialization and expression. Writing and painting help see it as if engaged in a kind of 'spatial investigation' proceeding by experiment and induction.' (11) The French writer Michel Tournier in turn ponders what would happen to geometries of living if we existed in isolation from the 'assemblages' - the cities and buildings - surrounding us. (12) Without this framing, we become lost, which is also a new way of finding ourselves anew.

Gormley is an artist who creates spaces of Otherness - spaces with a very distinct mood, or that evoke a particular mental state. He then introduces the Other into his space either in the form of a single sculpture or group of sculptures evoking human forms and mental states, their postures and gestures conveying readily identifiable emotions. One of the key works in this exhibition, MEET (2014), is a sculpture which, unusually for Gormley, depicts two figures or two human-spatial constructs with two heads. As we move around the sculpture, the two heads appear to merge and then separate again. The figures seem to inhabit a self-contained, protective cocoon, relegating us to the role of outside observers in a different way to Gormley's solitary figures. The scene also connects with Jacques Lacan's concept of 'mirror stage' in which ego is established 'as fundamentally dependent upon external objects, as an other'. (13)

Each sculpture has a particular role to play in the exhibition space. Some are compact, enclosed volumes - sealed boxes with a powerful density of presence that arrests our gaze. They seem to pull our thoughts inwards, almost as if closing our eyes. Others are weightless and transparent like drawings, consisting of nothing but pure lines. Gormley describes this conjunction: 'In the exhibition in Stockholm there will be a dialogue between three-dimensional drawing, mass and boxes, but we have added this fourth term, which is a work where the mass has been opened up. As you turn around in the space you get a dialogue between the drawn and the enclosed.' (14)

The translation of digital information into geometrical form is inevitably a process of abstraction. The artists Gormley names as his historical precursors are the Cubists and above all the Suprematists, notably Kazimir Malevich and his three- dimensional geometrical experiments, Jacques Lipchitz, who used abstract forms to portray the human figure, and Fritz Wotruba. All three of those artists were active in the interwar period, all similarly drawing inspiration from the Cubist/ Suprematist tradition. Wotruba shifted between a figurative and abstract vocabulary and, interestingly, also showed a marked interest in architecture. (15)

In his pivotal essay 'The Moment of Cubism' (1966-68), John Berger states that 'the Cubists created the possibility of art revealing processes instead of static entities. The content of their art consists of various modes of interaction: the interaction between different aspects of the same event, between empty space and filled space, between structure and movement, between the seer and the thing seen'. (16) Cubism, according to Berger, was an artistic reaction to the overall chaos of the time as well as the new understanding of both science, art and the media situation of the time. It was radical in its take on the spirit of the time, but not political in the traditional sense of the term. Its most radical element was perhaps the fact that human life, nature and universe were seen as a totality that had to be reckoned with without any ideological, historical or philosophical filters. In a way, this reminds us of the situation we are living today and puts Gormley's statement cited below, that his art perhaps looks 'curious and un-contemporary', into a totally new framework: how should we relate his art to the present moment, and how wide and deep should our analysis of these sculptures go beyond the traditional models of interpretation.

Commenting on his stylistic connection with Suprematism and Cubism, Gormley has stated the following: 'This may make my work look curious and un-contemporary, but I think of this as a necessary reply to Minimalism and the language of Carl Andre, Donald Judd and Sol LeWitt, where they take industrially determined units as a way of articulating both space and sculpture. I want to pull that back. With the serialism of Judd and Andre, in which no affect is allowed, in some sense we are asked to admire the exercise of ordering for its own sake as the net to hold your attention. I want to question the endless permutations of a LeWitt or a Judd that never take account of their relations or the feelings these structures elicit. I'm trying to say that okay, I'm making this allusion to manufactured things or the absolute geometry and repetition of a mechanically produced object, but I'm trying to then imbue them with the possibility of feeling. Not in the sense of illustrating that feeling but to use it as the ground onto which the viewer's feelings may be projected. Literally, this is just the model of a place that people can project their thoughts and feelings onto.' (17)

Gormley creates a variety of spatial constructs using or growing out of the human figure, each with its own distinctive affect. His recent 'living mobiles' are a good example, some of which feature soft, graceful lines that cascade invitingly from the ceiling, while others consist of repellent or chaotic spikey contraptions, their free-form structure articulating the space like an architecture of clouds. In the centre is a void contained within the outline of a human figure, a recognisable human presence that serves as our reference point. As is customary with Gormley's sculptures, the affect is based on holistic mimetics - we feel the emotions and postures resonating through our own bodies. This kind of inter-human experience is part of the new understanding that quantum physics has explored. Within this realm of physics, the basis of reality is, as defined by David Bohm, 'holomovement', where nothing can be separated from a continual emergence, while everything and everybody are connected. Gormley has stated that his works DRIFT (2009) and FIRMAMENT (2008) are evoking this notion, as well as reflecting on a growing understanding of our neural networks.

Our emotional reaction to Gormley's sculptures is a response to the network, matrix or tangle of lines enveloping the human figure, which serves as notation or 'sheet music' that we interpret both mentally and through our bodies. We are like musicians interpreting a musical score. The 'music' is dramatically articulated by the dynamic relations between the various sculptures on display in Stockholm, which perform their own choreography, creating a conscious 'geometry of seeing' that articulates the relations between the figure and the space, imbuing all with meaning. At the core is always the human form, the feelings and the moment it conveys, its presence within the space, and what it expresses. The viewer is embroiled in this unfolding drama - as always, Gormley creates spaces with and for the viewer. Each carefully orchestrated/ dramatised composition can be regarded as a 'spatial exploration'.

A digital scan of the human body has no dominant perspective unlike conventional representations of the human figure, which is traditionally portrayed frontally, en face. Even the Cubists adhered to a frontal perspective, but added various 'virtual' points of view, which nevertheless remain subordinate to the overarching frontality. When we meet a new person, what we usually remember about them is their face and physique. Gormley, however, does not portray the human face in order to convey feeling - for him, the human figure represents the human condition. It is vital that we view his architectural figures from every conceivable angle, by circling them, because they keep changing incessantly - they embody states of 'becoming', as coined by Whitehead, or 'engaging in the holomovement of weaving presentness in spacetime', as stated by Gormley.

Deleuze argues that a world that is expressed at once from many perspectives assumes a new shape, for instance, in modern art, where we find a space that is not simply decentred or without any overarching point of view, but without the need for problem of autrui, of being with others, then becomes one of constructing spaces owned by no one, allowing disparate points of view to coexist in the absence of any 'architectonic' system or harmony. (18)

Each work in the exhibition has its own density of presence, constituting what Gormley describes as a 'self-contained world', but there is one particular sculpture that is central to the entire exhibition: MATRIX (2014). At its centre is a rectangular void matching the dimensions of the artist's body. This void is created by the intersection of eleven rectangular cages that produce the effect of overlapping squares, which grow progressively denser the closer they encroach upon the empty space in the middle. As a whole, MATRIX articulates a particular way of experiencing the world. How would or does it feel to inhabit a strange, intricately networked, amorphous world that seems strangest of all when it is right up close, without any distancing space to restore one's sense of perspective. In fact, perspective is used to destroy the perspectival inference of a privileged single point of view.

Michel Tournier's 'solitary hero journeys to a strange new sense of the Earth… The induction is then that this Earth subsists in all the geometries of our lives, all our relations with one another. Tournier's tales show that autrui is not a subject or an object but a principle of the spatial dispositions of our being together, which can itself become undone, exposing a potential for "other geometries". The problem changes. Being seen voyeuristically is not after all a matter of a primal shame or identity anxiety. Instead of the great duel of gazes in a café, one confronts what happens when the perceptual system itself loosens up, allowing other things to happen. There arises the new problem of spaces of possible "encounter" not rooted in the futilities of the search for recognition, but concerned instead with the play of other possible worlds'. (19)

MATRIX makes an unambiguous reference to virtual space, a space unlike any other we have known before or might encounter anywhere else. 'The idea of the virtual is quite old. The word comes from virtus, meaning potential or force, and often comes coupled with the actual, meaning that through which the potential or force becomes at once visible and effective.' (20) Deleuze took the concept of the virtual in a new direction: 'To actualise the virtual,' Deleuze says, 'is not the same as to realise the possible, and it is crucial not to confuse the two'. (21) Here we are dealing with the possibility of 'representational knowledge' or the virtual, which contains the idea of the possible as something more than the real - it is possible with existence added to it. Deleuze rejects the notion of the possible in favour of the term virtual, which in his thinking is fully real. (22)

MATRIX conveys the feel of the urban space we occupy, in which we are perpetually surrounded by a grid of multiple different forms and points of view. Gormley thus actualises the virtual space we inhabit today. Somewhere, in the midst of all these disparate forms, points of view and the junctures between them, you, I, we and they converge and for a brief moment we can feel ourselves connecting, sensing each other's presence and

sharing a feeling of oneness and common space. As Gormley puts it, 'It becomes a context for being and looking'. In MATRIX, the human condition is encapsulated in the void inside the grid structure, which defines the coordinates of our subject-position and gaze in relation to the work as a whole.

MATRIX thus becomes the chiasma or nexus of the whole exhibition, not only articulating the gallery space, but also mirroring the content of all the other works on display. Just as Gormley sees architecture as ideally being able to do. We are also shown our position in spacetime. In Gormley's words: 'The work puts us between its condition and the condition of the enclosing room/building/street/city, so that while becoming dizzy trying to focus and losing ourselves in a perceptual maze in which there are no figure/ground relations, we might also become aware of our lostness in the city grid'. We are experiencing a very real feeling of our existence in big cities today. One might define it as realistic art by other means. It can grasp the complex, multi-layered, fragmented and mediated reality that we live today. It awakens our attention of the present inner state of our minds and what is actually going on around us.

Translation by Silja Kudel

1 'Antony Gormley: What Do Artists Do All Day?', television broadcast, BBC Four, London, 2014.
2 Marja-Terttu Kivirinta, 'Kehomme yhdistaa meidat maailmankaikkeuten', 'Helsingin Sanomat', 20 January 1995.
3 Conversation with the artist at his studio in London, 14 May 2014.
4 Ibid.
5 John Rajchman, 'Constructions', Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1998, p. 97.
6 Ibid., p. 100.
7 Virginia Woolf, 'Mrs Dalloway', London: Penguin, 1964, p. 13.
8 J. Rajchman, 'Constructions', op. cit., p. 98.
9 Conversation with the artist, 14 May 2014.
10 J. Rajchman, 'Constructions', op. cit., p. 92.
11 J. Rajchman, 'Constructions', op. cit., p. 93.
12 Ibid.
13 See: www.english.hawaii.edu/criticalink/lacan. Last accessed on 30 June 2014.
14 Conversation with the artist, 14 May 2014.
15 Fritz Wotruba designed the Church of the Most Holy Trinity in Vienna-Mauer, better known as the Wotruba Church. It was completed posthumously in 1976 - one year after the artist's death.
16 John Berger, 'The Moment of Cubism and Other Essays', New York: Pantheon Books, 1969, p. 23.
17 Conversation with the artist, 14 May 2014.
18 J. Rajchman, 'Constructions', op. cit., p. 96.
19 J. Rajchman, 'Constructions', op. cit., pp. 94-5.
20 J. Rajchman, 'Constructions', op. cit., p. 115.
21 J. Rajchman, 'Constructions', op. cit., p. 115, quoting Gilles Deleuze's 'Différence et repetition', Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1968, p. 269ff.
22 See: www.iep.utm.edu/. Last accessed on 30 June 2014.