

# ANTONY GORMLEY

*IN CONVERSATION WITH HANS-ULRICH OBRIST*

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HANS-ULRICH OBRIST - It's fascinating because this is not our first conversation and actually, in a previous interview we also addressed the notion of expansion. It was at the moment of your Fourth Plinth commission *ONE AND OTHER* in Trafalgar Square, London in 2009 and at that time we discussed the idea of an expanded notion of art into social sculpture. Today we will talk about *EXPANSION FIELD* (2014), but before that I think we'll talk about the beginnings. Antony, in the exhibition at the Zentrum Paul Klee you also show three very early works: *FULL BOWL* (1977-78), *FLOOR* (1981) and *ONE APPLE* (1982). So I wanted to ask you how it all started, how you came to art or how art came to you, if there was a sudden epiphany and awakening, or how it all happened.

ANTONY GORMLEY - You ask big questions very simply. The truth is, I never believe those stories when artists say, 'I knew at the age of six that I was going to be an artist and I never wavered'. I've been wavering my entire life. I'm still trying to understand what the job is that sculpture can do. What can sculpture do for all of us? What can thinking through material do for us? The good thing it does is that it slows us down. I'm very fond of Joseph Beuys. I'm also very fond of the therapeutic model for art. By getting back in touch with first-hand experience of real things, like a climber on a rock face, you have to have an intimate relationship with material and a dialogue of a totally different kind to one of words: the hermeneutics of translating experience into language.

I wanted to start with an image of a spiral galaxy to evoke the place of human life in space at large. I've been trying to do that in different ways all my life. Here is an early work called *LAST TREE*. I am trying to reveal the memory of the first growth that is hidden inside the core of a tree. This was made in 1979, before I knew anything about Giuseppe Penone. This interest in origins and extensions continues in the piece *FULL BOWL*. I carved a wooden bowl on a lathe and then used it to beat sheet lead inside, to form another bowl. Then I went on beating bowls one inside the other. Every bowl was the mother of the one before. This initiates a theme that continues in *EXPANSION FIELD*. I want to make some kind of energy field between two voids, between a void that invites our imaginative inhabitation and the void of infinite space. This is a model of what sculpture can do, setting up a vibrational field. So this dark space at the centre relates to the dark space inside every single one of the hermetic bodies of *EXPANSION FIELD*. It relates to space at large. So the idea of a core, that becomes a dark void, that's the beginning for me. It connects to childhood. I was sent upstairs for an enforced rest after lunch and aged six, you don't want a rest. You want to be rushing about. It was a challenge to lie still with eyes closed and be in this claustrophobic space behind my eyes that was red, hot and dark. It would be a summer afternoon; you could hear the birds singing and the wind in the trees: all the invitations of the world. Somehow, I was stuck inside this claustrophobic, dark interior space but I discovered that that space, if you dwell in it, expanded until it became cool and darker and bluer and ever larger. Anyway, that's here too in the work.

HUO - *ONE APPLE* is another piece which relates to childhood. Earlier I spoke to the attendant in the gallery at the Zentrum Paul Klee who told me that you were shaking one of the lead apples at the opening and there was a noise inside.

AG - This work was also made when I was thinking about this idea of infinite growth and infinite expansion. My wife's family lives just outside London and they had an orchard. I watched the apple trees blossom and then their progress into being fully-laden with red apples. The type of apple was called 'Discovery'. I thought of making a work that follows the growth of a fruit through to the complete apple, from the time that the first petals fall from a flower. In a way it is like a movie. It's a narrative. It's called *ONE APPLE* but actually it's 42 apples and the apples are really there. So you can hear the apples when you shake the pieces, not that you're allowed to shake them in a gallery context, but I shook one earlier just to prove they are really there. These are 42 little reliquaries of real apples, in a sequence of growth. The apples were moulded in plaster and again the lead was beaten inside the half bowl of one half of the mould. I put the dried apples inside this timeless skin and sealed them up. *ONE APPLE* is interrogating that old relationship between subject and referent, between the model and the image, but this is indexical; real proof. The model is in the referent. This truth claim is an important part of the ethical position of the work. The work derives from a real event, a real moment in time, a real body, whether it's an apple or a human being.

HUO - In your very early work there are reliquaries and traces of the human body. The other day I was in Belgium and saw in the Marian Collection your very early piece with its body silhouette, *CONSUMPTION* (1982). That's more or less made around the same time?

AG - That was a key moment. Before any image of the body occurred in the work, I was thinking about the gateways between the body as a container and the materials or the things that enter the body. I made a series of works out of bread, trying to reverse, in a way, the mind/material relationship. If Michelangelo's 'Slaves' are an evocation of a neo-platonic idea of the struggle between spirit and matter, if they suggest that the work of a sculptor is achieved through physical prowess and genius, with the ability to impose some spiritual form on inert, intransigent matter, then I thought that the reverse was just as interesting. That somehow, that the thing that we each do at breakfast is a transformation of matter into mind. Eating is an alchemical transformation. I made a number of works using bread; a substance that lies outside for a while then enters the body and then becomes the body. *CONSUMPTION* is the void silhouette of a rising body eaten out of a single membrane made of about 200 slices of medium-sliced, 'Mother's Pride', an industry-produced bread. It is actually unlike bread, more like a building material. In another work *BED* (1980), over a three-and-a-half-month period I ate my own body volume out of 600 loaves of medium-sliced Mother's Pride bread. I don't ever want to eat that kind of bread again.

I wanted to celebrate our dependency, our dependency on the earth. It was strange that in the process of making *BED*, the bread became mouldy and new life started to grow on it. The top of each slice of bread is covered in mould and it begins to look like a field pattern seen from the air. Obviously I was making a reference to the bed as a growing place. A flowerbed is a bed but so is the bed that we sleep and procreate in. These two half volumes look like a marriage bed but also like a tomb. This is talking about the growth of an object but it's also a sarcophagus, just like the lead carapaces for the apples. This is an idea of continuums, the folding of ends into means, trying to look in the things that already exist in reverse, looking at time in objects and through them, the relationship of time to our own bodies.

HUO - I think I deviated from the chronology with my question about the apples... All the works in the last room in the Zentrum Paul Klee exhibition

grew out of the 1970s, so I wanted to ask you about being in England at that time. The other day I spoke to Phyllida Barlow, who told me that somewhere at the beginning of the 70s she felt very much that it was all a reaction against Anthony Caro, against that formalism, against that type of work. Obviously this work is slightly later in the 70s, when you entered the art world. I was wondering if there was any reaction still against that sort of formalism of Caro, or if it was somehow a different thing. It would just be great to hear a little bit about England in the 70s and the context out of which these early works grew.

AG - I went to art school late. I had already been to university for three years. I then went to India for three years. Then I decided in India that I wanted to be a sculptor and went back to art school for three years. By the time I got to a postgraduate course, I was 27 years of age: old. I was really tired of art about art. I was tired of the notion that in art you have this alternating current: Caro's formalism is contested by Richard Long, who is contested by Tony Cragg, who is then contested by Simon Starling. This is a strange idea about human imagination where art is only understandable through what happened making LAST TREE and FULL BOWL, I was simply trying to get back to reality. I guess CONSUMPTION and BED were just trying to say, 'Look, let's not talk about art and the languages of art but let's talk about life and death.' You could say this work (BREAD LINE, 1979) comes out of a Richard Long line but it also doesn't because it's not a formal gesture in a landscape but is trying to objectify time. My beginning was mid-to-late 70s. FULL BOWL is 1977 to 1979; it took a long time to make. I didn't really want to do anything that looked like art. FULL BOWL was my breakfast bowl: a meditation on the behaviour of materials, how a drop falls into a full, still, body of water, how, in a way, a bowl sits in the hand, how a bowl is a surrogate for the space between two hands. Why is an apple, such a universal idea of fruit? Why does it appear in the Bible? Why is Newton's apple such a powerful metaphor? It carries our relationship to nature, to fruitfulness, but also to time beyond the biological. It's older. We know that plants have been around longer than bodies with neurological systems. The reason that I was inspired by Beuys was that he insisted on a wider understanding of art. We are all victims of the commercialisation of art. If we go back to the pioneers of modernity, if we think about Piet Mondrian, Wassily Kandinsky or Paul Klee, they were trying to find a language that really was universal and that could somehow reanimate life by giving us things that we could relate to immediately. But at the other end of the twentieth century, the story of a century of art has been made into a kind of doxa. The history of those one hundred years from Kandinsky's ÜBER DAS GEISTIGE IN DER KUNST (Concerning the Spiritual in Art, 1911) and Marcel Duchamp's first BICYCLE WHEEL (1911), to postmodernity, has become a kind of obsession with the languages of art for its own sake, a recondite history that is used both to validate work and to sell it. But the challenge to art remains the same; make it from experience and make it open to experience, not from laws or from the affordance of history. Sorry, that was a long lecture about a need to return to first-hand experience.

HUO - There was one thing you said before which made me curious to know more about you in India, deciding that you wanted to become an artist. What triggered that? Was it the whole experience or did you see something in India?

AG - I went to India because three years of Cambridge was enough of thinking and I wanted to do some living and India gave me that in spades. Somehow, for somebody from a cold, northern climate to go somewhere warm, where everything was felt and where you could smell it before you could see it - well, that, combined with learning Vipassana meditation, was life full on. I was very lucky to meet a Burmese teacher of this very simple technique of bare attention and to realise that actually simply being silent and still could, in a way, give you more as the focus of total concentration than all the thousands of books that I'd been invited to read. The question needing a decision was, 'do I stay in a monastery and try to achieve enlightenment through meditation or do I try to take this experience of a very intense, physical living and make things that might perhaps encourage other people to have a more intense, physical experience of living?'

HUO - You mentioned Mondrian and Kandinsky. I had long conversations with César Domela when he was still alive, about twenty years ago, about his meetings with Kandinsky and Mondrian. He talked about this incredible exchange and dialogue that existed between these artists at the beginning of the twentieth century. In Switzerland we have Dada, which was another kind of exchange and dialogue. In the 70s, it's less this idea of groups with manifestos. Still, I was wondering, in your desire to get back to reality, to get back to life, not to make art about art, did you have allies in that, artists with whom you exchanged in England or internationally? It's interesting also because England in the 70s is incomparable to England today, I mean to London as now being this global city. But artists always tell me it was much more insular. There was not much information.

AG - None of us thought we would ever make our living by selling our work. So there was this small group of us and we were all, in a way, supported and encouraged at the same time. This was a time when getting a £500 grant from the Arts Council of England meant a lot. It also meant that somehow you were recognised. I suppose my immediate colleagues with whom I grew up and I still see; some more than others, are Richard Deacon, Bill Woodrow, Anish Kapoor, Alison Wilding, Peter Randall-Page. All of us were shown with Tony Cragg although he had left for Germany quite soon after finishing at the Royal College. We were all doing postgraduate courses at the same time in the mid-to-late 70s. Tony and Bill were interested in some way in looking at the texture of urban life, very much in opposition to Richard Long's pastoralism. I suppose Anish and I were looking for something else, which had to do with our fascination with the vessel and using the potential of the stillness of sculpture as a positive force. Alison has an incredible sensibility for material. All of us were looking at work from Europe: at Reiner Ruthenbeck and the post-Beuys boys, Reinhard Mucha, Harald Klingelhöller and others and at sculpture from the other side of the Atlantic: Carl Andre, Sol LeWitt, Richard Serra, and for me particularly, Walter De Maria. I loved the photograph of his parallel chalk drawing in the middle of a desert. I was lucky enough to go and see him and THE LIGHTNING FIELD in 1979. There was something there about escaping from the commercialism of New York and doing those gestures that were absolutely about first-hand experience of space in the far west that was very inspiring. I made a pilgrimage to see Serra as well as Walter in 1979. They were both, in different ways very encouraging. Richard just said to me, 'You've just got to decide what you want to do, you know. You're doing a lot of stuff and you've just got to do one thing and you've got to do it well.' I didn't take that advice terribly well. He was wonderfully pragmatic! With Walter, I've still got the letter he sent me after I did my first show in New York. He just said, 'Antony, those lead figures are really terrific, you've just got to keep on doing them and just do them in all kinds of different positions and it's just going to be great!': a robust and practical attitude! I just thought of my work as research rather than doing stuff and doing it big and carrying on doing it. Anyway, that was something like a context for me at the beginning. Returning from America, I continued a Beuysian interest in revealing the time and history embedded in material, and in the process work of the Italians, having discovered the work of Giuseppe Penone, Mario Merz and Giovanni Anselmo in particular. Anselmo's pieces of granite with a compass and De Maria's THE VERTICAL EARTH KILOMETER (1977) both represented a reality principle: what is the world made out of, what are the underlying structures, how can we see beyond appearances?

HUO - How fascinating. I think that this whole idea of experiment and you not following the advice of your American colleagues to just do one thing and do it again and again leads back to the genesis of expansion fields. So maybe we should go back to the beginning.

AG - Now it's going to get very academic because it's much more fun to zigzag than to go in a straight line. How can you translate the implications of ONE APPLE and FULL BOWL into a human presence? FLOOR is the outline of my feet on the floor, the place of a human being indicated as a silhouette that expands infinitely. This came out of the first work that I ever showed in an international context at the Milan Triennale in 1980: AN EXERCISE BETWEEN BLOOD AND EARTH. It's very simple. The most celebrated Western, figurative sculpture tries to capture movement. A crazy idea because sculpture is still. Here is this silhouette of a running man re-described in the manner of FLOOR, from a miniature to as wide as my arm

could draw. It is a model for a process that ends up with EXPANSION FIELD. This is where that thinking ended up in sculpture (STILL RUNNING, 1990), an expansion from a mould of me in a running position, better described in this piece (FLARE, 2007): the expansion around a falling body. STILL RUNNING is about volition, a body that is driven by its own intention. Here the body is in freefall. It is not doing, it is being; simply falling through space and then expanded. This shows you an explosion from a body zone identified through a polyhedral net expanded to a consistent expansion length, a similar expansion to EXPANSION FIELD.

In DRAWN (2000), I wanted to talk about two bodies. We primarily live in a biological body but the second body, after our clothes, is architecture. I wanted the work to interact with architecture rather than taking the privileged position of the centre of the room. How do you begin to reinsert the materialised body into the arena of art without relying on the devices that make art into a separate case for itself in the world, the frame and the plinth, and instead allow it to interact directly with the world? DRAWN is an attempt to do this, a work that is not one unique object. This work accepts that it is made in what Walter Benjamin called 'the age of mechanical reproduction', and consists of one form which is cast eight times and installed in different orientations. This is a nameless body. It's not unique. It's not the unique masterpiece. It has an unstable relationship with the viewer and the space it is in: occupying the parts of the room that are furthest from the centre, whereas the viewer finds him/herself in the position that you might traditionally have found a naked and idealised marble statue of Venus. All architecture wants us to feel that we are somehow in a stable, fixed place that has been and will be here for a while. This work interrogates and destabilises these certainties. These anonymous, cloned body forms sense the space which contains them. Their individual masses act almost like black holes within the space, flung to the corners as if the room was a centrifuge, suggesting that nothing is fixed. All celestial objects are spinning, the Earth is spinning and spins around the sun at great speed, and the galaxy of which our system is part is spinning. The point is that the whole notion that anything has a fixed place in space is an illusion. Each part of DRAWN is made from 630 kilograms of iron. Molten iron can be found 3,000 kilometres straight down towards the core of the earth. It defines the density of our planet, gives us our magnetic field and keeps us on our orbit through space so it is an appropriate material for this work of putting celestial and biological bodies in tension.

So what does this installation do? It puts the emphasis back onto us as experiencers of this space that has been catalysed in a certain way, as the originators of meaning. These are not symbolic forms. They are voided, empty, meaningless, material masses: meteorites in human form put in a certain relationship with the frame of architecture in order to make a kind of field in which you, as the viewer, have to begin to generate some understanding.

HUO - You mentioned a relationship to architecture. How did that start? Did you sort of auto-didactically study architecture? Did you visit a lot of architectural experiences? What is your relationship to architecture? How did architecture enter your world?

AG - I've always thought of sculpture and architecture being in a continuum. I've always thought of sculpture in terms of being a place before it is a thing. I've always loved caves and dark places. I've always liked sheds and digging tunnels. When I had the opportunity, I went to Egypt in 1969 during the Israeli- Egyptian war and there were no tourists. I visited the Great Pyramid at Cheops and there was nobody there. So I lay for an hour in the great sarcophagus in the King's Chamber above the gallery in the dark. I went to Mycenae and the amazing Tholos tombs of Atreus and Clytemnestra, extraordinary sculptural spaces, to the Pantheon, the Caves of Elephanta out in the bay of Mumbai, to the Bamiyan Buddhas in Afghanistan, which I visited before they were blown up.

HUO - The whole cosmic Indian architectures?

AG - Yes and the Jantar Mantar in New Delhi.

HUO - And that's fascinating in relation to the cosmos and space.

AG - Those idealists, Étienne-Louis Boullée and Claude- Nicolas Ledoux, thought of architecture as an interface between consciousness and cosmos. In their work there is an implicit understanding that under the dome of your skull is an organ with the potential for a universal extension. The dome of Brunelleschi or St Paul's or the Pantheon is for me an expression of the human need to make a second skull to contain our minds and an expression of the fear we have of being exposed to space. Why are gothic cathedrals so extraordinary? Because they are an attempt to remake a firmament and to create an equivalent to the human imagination. Great architecture is in imaginative adventure: Stonehenge, the Temple of Zeus in Baalbek and the Great Hypostyle Hall in Karnak are beyond use. These are structures that human beings have had to make in order to reconcile imagination and space at large. Architecture has the power to transform human relations and human behaviour.

HUO - What that obviously announces, and I think we see it in the work BREATHING ROOM (2006), is the notion of immersion. The viewer is immersed.

AG - Yes, this is immersion: the viewer becomes the figure in the ground. BREATHING ROOM is my conversation with Piero della Francesca or with the idea of the cité idéale; this obsession with perspective as an idea of actually controlling space or the representation of space. I'm saying, 'No, we can use perspective to destroy perspective and re-insert reverie into architecture'. So the viewer becomes the figure in the ground and the viewed for other viewers, but this dialectic between the meditative and then the interrogative was frightening. The light was so bright that you can see the veins, blue under the skin. You could see exactly how many layers of makeup people had on. I was expecting people to be terrified and run away, but people were fascinated, apart from having to shield their eyes. This dialogue or interrogation of architecture, like with Drawn, was a way of catalysing a real space, the space of a gallery: a transfer of language between anatomy and architecture. So, here is a body falling backwards and this work LEAN (2012) is often shown against the wall, just as the pieces of DRAWN went into direct contact, but here it is an osmosis. Anatomy has been replaced by the language of stacking, cantilever and propping: the language that informs EXPANSION FIELD. BREATH (INCREMENTAL EXPANSION) MODELS (2012) is a sequence of models that applies exactly the same exercise of ONE APPLE to a human body and the digital render 'Incremental expansion of a standing pose from scan to cube' is the scan of a man, now described in architectural terms, with incremental reduction on one side and incremental expansion on the other: the key to the EXPANSION FIELD.

HUO - I was wondering in terms of measure, we talked about measure and the body and I wanted to ask you about Le Corbusier and his Modulor. Is that somehow something that is present?

AG - Alberti and the Renaissance had a notion of how a built environment could come together in harmony by following proportions coming from a measure derived from the human form. I think of the Modulor of Le Corbusier as being a continuation of that, but unlike the Vitruvian man who stands either fully extended or with his arms to his side, Le Corbusier's Modulor is reaching for the sun. I think of them as a continuation, one after the other,

but I am not continuing that humanist idea of man as the measure of all things. I am much more interested in in-dwelling within a bodily organism. I am inspired by the small Michelangelo marble sculpture in the Hermitage of a crouching boy holding his foot; he could be removing a thorn, an old classical subject, but for me it was the image of a body attending to itself, to its own condition. This internalised moment became FORM (2013), a stack of blocks which still holds that feeling of introspection, but it has been expanded incrementally to the point where we reach a cube: MURMUR (2014). This is an increase in scale by increment: the application of the cosmological constant, the incremental expansion of the dimension of space itself, an objective measure, onto subjective space, somewhat similar to the way that STILL RUNNING would have ended up as a sphere.

HUO - Architects talk a lot about the way the computer changed the way they worked, they talk a lot about the fact that they can actually do things now that they could never have done before the computer. At the beginning of your work, drawing always played a role, drawing in space, and you continue to draw. However, I suppose, looking at this at a certain moment, the computer also enters. I was wondering when that happened when you had your first computer and if that changed something?

AG - When we moved to the new studio, we had three computers and they were mainly used for doing the accounts. Now we have something like 35 computers. What an amazing tool a computer is for thinking spatially. It's an extraordinary extension of our ability to try things out, particularly when related to 3D printing. So, we do a lot of stereolithographic sintering as trials to make small models. Computers help us design, test, find the centres of gravity, do the laser-cutting, everything. We developed this way of working over the last twelve years with Tristan Simmonds, who came to the studio from Arup. Tristan was part of Cecil Balmond's advanced geometry unit. He developed a whole range of new software, which we then used as plugins to adapt and extend the capability of Rhino, a fantastic 3D programme we use. Once you loosen a relationship to human scale, the Modular, then everything can take on universal absolutes. EXPANSION FIELD nos. 37, 38, 39 and 40/60 are in the pose of an extended body testing its own environment with its hands up. When you get up to a 14-metre expansion of this pose, the constants are absolute, so this dimension, the distance between the hand and the armpit, has been translated relationally to this edge detail of what is almost a cube. This is like background cosmic radiation, where you've got the echo of that event that happened 13.7 billion years ago, the beginning of space and time. Le Corbusier and modernist architecture still believed in a Renaissance vision of being able to rationally control both nature and our habitat. Now, in a time of global warming, we know that that is an illusion. That's the background of EXPANSION FIELD. This field is about the incommensurable, about the non-understandable, about the darkness that is at the other side of these expanded hermetic bunkers and the darkness of deep space.

HUO - That leads us to your project at Ropac Pantin in Paris, another form of expansion.

AG - Yes, MATRIX II (2014) is virtual architecture, a three-dimensional drawing which makes architectural spaces mutable, shifting closer to the way consciousness works within the body. The work identifies sixteen room-sized volumes that interconnect around an empty space equivalent to two adjacent standing bodies. Using re-enforcing steel mesh, the skeleton of cast-concrete buildings, it interrogates the form and structure of the human habitat. As you walk around this piece you feel disorientation because of the difficulty of distinguishing foreground, mid-ground and background in the multiple layering of the different meshes. Perspective was used to capture space and use it for illusion. Here, materialised perspective is used to destroy visual perspective.

HUO - It would be great to hear a little bit about the genesis of such a complicated piece. You've told us a lot now about the process of these previous pieces, you've talked about the beginnings. So, you visit the space here and how does it then go? Do you start with a sketch or with a drawing? Do you start with a computer? Do you think first of all and then go back to the studio?

AG - My first idea was to show MODEL (2012) at the Zentrum Paul Klee, my first attempt to model a piece of architecture based on the body. It is a 24-chambered building with three open vessels in its cellular structure that allows in light. But we quickly established that the building couldn't handle the weight of this piece of approximately 100 tonnes. I then started thinking of how to use the extraordinary volume of the main hall where light and space would surround some intense, introverted darkspaces. I had already made some solid expansions but felt that there was a possibility of doing a continuation of the ONE APPLE idea using voided architectural carapaces. I was very interested in having two thirds more of the total area of the gallery as a space that would allow you to move freely around the work, and when in the field itself in relation to the 60 closed volumes, that you could move between but couldn't enter. I got very excited about a show that would be this realm of light and generous openness, containing closed un-enterable dark spaces. I started to make the forms and expansions: in the end I used 21 body forms that were all expanded, ranging between stasis and falling, a four-square stable symmetry and destabilisation. Some bodies are turning, about to fall, some are leaning backwards. Throughout the field there is a dialogue between stability and instability. The inevitable progress of the expansion means that, irrespective of whether they start from unstable body positions they become, like cenotaphs or obelisks, stable volumes. This 'growth from within' is very strong for EXPANSION FIELD at Ropac Pantin, where the sculptures are to be positioned much closer together and, being in a smaller space, will come much closer to the walls. The sense of spatial displacement will be greater and the ability of the work to make you feel your own scale in relation to these hermetic volumes will be more powerful.

HUO - Is EXPANSION FIELD a project that will continue? Is it expanding, continuing to grow?

AG - I think that the logical next conclusion is to build the 18-metre cube but that has some pragmatic limitations and I think I need to be invited to build it somewhere.

HUO - That obviously leads me to my favourite question, the only, as you know, recurring question in all my interviews, which is the question about the unrealised project. I wanted to ask you, within your many decades of realising so many works, there must be unrealised projects, projects that have been too big or too small to be realised, maybe also lost competition entries, censored projects or self-censored projects. There are also the projects we don't dare to do, so I was wondering what are the unbuilt roads of Antony Gormley? Maybe if you could tell us one or two examples within this field of the unrealised particularly dear to you, dreams you'd like to make happen.

AG - My most megalomaniac is that, somewhere in the central part of the Eurasian continent, somewhere maybe in Kazakhstan or Azerbaijan, to somehow use the combined infantries of China, Russia and NATO to build an imaginative space in the manner of the Pantheon. It would not be visible at all on the surface of the Earth but be a vast dome but with no visible exterior. You could imagine EXPANSION FIELD as a buried series of spaces. I originally imagined it as an ovoid like an egg, with a single oval oculus at the top that would have particular acoustic sensibilities and where, somehow, people could gather for discussions about the planet's future or for mass choral events. That's the most ambitious idea. The immediate unrealised project is for Florence, where we were hoping to do a series of 30 marble sleeping bodies, life-size and on the ground in the Piazza Signoria, adapted to that very uneven surface, in relationship to the copy of Michelangelo's DAVID, Giambologna's THE RAPE OF THE SABINE WOMEN, Cellini's PERSEUS WITH THE HEAD OF MEDUSA and Donatello's JUDITH AND HOLOFERNES, to see what sculpture could do in terms

of collective space. Could these prone forms made of rectilinear masses help us to relate to each other but also to our humanly made habitat? After much negotiation, I am now going to install 104 sculptures in the Forte Belvedere on the other side of the Arno river using the massive 16th century defensive Florentine architecture as a foil for dark life-size body forms, as a meditation on the relationship between beauty and terror.

HUO - Are there drawings for the Azerbaijan idea?

AG - Yes, there are, there are but I think I should keep them out of sight.

HUO - Now, the second idea, the Florence idea, leads us to the last question I wanted to ask you, which is something I wanted to address in relation to the expanded field, it leads us back to Beuys and the expanded notion of sculpture. Obviously, your Fourth Plinth Trafalgar Square sculpture ONE AND OTHER had to do with social sculpture with this interaction with people and the city. I just wanted to ask you to tell us a little bit about the whole idea of social sculpture and if there are any plans of making sculpture on the scale of a city.

AG - Well, the legacy of Beuys is the idea that you can start a transformation within society as a social sculpture, similar to the transformation of material in studio sculpture. Both attempt to affect mind and feeling. ONE AND OTHER used the traditional frame of civic memorial statuary as the tool to examine identity, representation, memory and value through the direct involvement of randomly chosen but widely sourced participants. If art is a space in which who we are and what we feel can be imaged and then contested, of course it can have extraordinary potential as a tool for both self-realisation and the emergence of new forms of collectivity. The Florence project was another example of playing with the trope of civic monuments. We were proposing to find 100 communities that could have been as diverse as lawyers and prostitutes, priests and traffic wardens, teachers and sportspeople, and ask them to elect one of their group to be scanned. Through a cubic algorithm, we would then translate the scans into a three-dimensional printed white nylon life-size sculptures that would have been placed on the skyline of this Renaissance city. They would have interacted with the sleeping people or building models on the Piazza Signoria. This is a continuation of the questions that were asked by the fourth plinth on Trafalgar Square: who are we, what values do we hold and how do we express them? Art can be a place of exchange and of transformation, of seeing what is there and also of seeing how it can be changed. Nothing remains the same and art least of all. If we learnt one thing in the hundred years of its emancipation from the power of the patron, it should give us the possibility of seeing ourselves and through that, of re-inventing ourselves. Once art becomes an open space, the freedoms that art and artists took for themselves can now be offered back to the viewer, transforming him/her into a participant in the arising of value: and the most valuable thing of all is in the creation of a self.

HUO - You have recently made a work in London that is in part within civic space but is also a private space?

AG - A work that is a landmark, a large piece of sculpture, but it's also a place to dream, to sleep, to make love. ROOM is a room that is part of a hotel. The interior, entirely lined in oak, has a monumental aspect, so it is 10 metres high, but it also contains a bed. The bed is in the stomach of this great steel man. There is a window, the window is open but what is this proposing? The integration of imaginative furniture within the built environment. Seamlessly, functionally integrated but that also, perhaps, invites you to think about our dependency on this second body, the body of building. I guess, you know, for me, it's not surprising that the distinction between sculpture and architecture has been dissolving and that Serra, Kapoor and myself have been making these spaces that are non-functional but use the articulation of space as a form of encouraging different kinds of mental state, a form of psychological architecture.

ROOM suggests that the highest luxury that you can have in a high-density inner city is silence; there's no television, there's no telephone. You are in the world but not of it. You're only 200 metres from the busiest shopping street in Europe but you're in something that is like a cave, that is like Saint Jerome's cell, that allows you in some way to be fully. This responsibility, whether you can call it the social responsibility of art and whether you can call it an evolution of Beuys's call for the artist to reintegrate his or her work within life and the living functionality of a city. We live in a time when all cities are exploding in an unplanned and commercialised attitude to urbanism. Somehow, these experiments, whether it's this or some of Olafur Eliasson's experiments with light and volume that re-enchant architecture as a place in which human being can be intensified. Our sensibility, our ability to be aware acoustically, in terms of light, humidity, the intelligence of our skins to relate to the nature and quality of our environment. This vigorous hybrid, between architecture and the sculpture, can offer us a place in which these perceptions can be sharpened. This means that nature, the thing that architecture was designed to protect us from, now has to be integrated. This really, is necessary in a time of the anthropic disturbance of our total planetary system.

HUO - That could not be a more wonderful conclusion.

This interview took place during the exhibition 'Antony Gormley: Expansion Field' at the Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern, Switzerland on 20 December, 2014.

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