

How is the concept of the 'body' realized within the experience of viewing artwork?



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Introduction

In 'The Primacy of Perception' Maurice Merleau-Ponty writes:

The perceiving mind is an incarnated mind. I have tried... to re-establish the roots of the mind in its body and its world, going against doctrines which treat perception as a simple result of the action of external things on our body as well as against those which insist on the autonomy of consciousness. These philosophies commonly forget- in favor of a pure exteriority or of a pure interiority- the insertion of the mind in corporeality, the ambiguous relation which we entertain with our body and, correlatively, with perceived things. ¹

Furthermore, in 'The World of Perception' Merleau-Ponty refers to the Kantian position "... I am a consciousness which embraces and constitutes the world..."² He, however, tried to take this philosophical stance further. He maintained that Kant had essentially overlooked what he termed as the "... the phenomenon of the body..."³ His aim was thus to determine "... the way in which 'the phenomenon of the body' is to be integrated into a Kantian philosophy, so that each one of us is not so much a 'consciousness' as a *body* which 'embraces and constitutes the world'..."⁴

The above passages are important in that they bring to the foreground issues that have been extensively debated and discussed within the realms of philosophy, phenomenology, psychology and art. The nature of the relationship between mind and body, matter and

¹ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, The Primacy of Perception-And Other Essays on Phenomenological Psychology, the Philosophy of Art, History and Politics, (U.S.A.: Northwestern University Press, 1989), pp.3-4

² Thomas Baldwin, 'Introduction' in Maurice Merleau-Ponty, The World of Perception, (London: Routledge, 2004), p.9

³ Ibid. p.9

⁴ Ibid. p.10

psyche is one that is highly ambiguous and complex. The concept of the 'body' as being a consciousness that incorporates mind and body, material and immaterial, is one that I intend to investigate within the field of art. It should be clarified at this point that the term psyche is sometimes used instead of mind in the context of this thesis. What I aim to explore is the merging of mind and body within the experience of viewing a work of art. This embodiment of the viewer within a physical and psychic corporeality is examined in relation to the art object and surrounding space. The concept of boundaries that exist between the viewer, art object and space is a crucial one that is discussed throughout the course of the essay.

For the purpose of this thesis, certain concepts and ideas from within the field of phenomenology will be discussed and utilized. However, it is important to stress that essentially, the aim is to investigate how these concepts are implemented or explored within the sphere of *art*. For this, certain works of art are used as examples onto which the theoretical analysis is applied. The artists whose work is utilized include Antony Gormley and Anish Kapoor.

Chapter 1 introduces the concept of boundaries that define the viewer from the art object and the surrounding space. It discusses the ambiguous nature of these and challenges the notion of the viewer's own 'bodiliness'. As exterior boundaries are transcended, the body is realized as a corporeality that includes matter and psyche.

Chapter 2 focuses on the notion of the interiority of the body. The transcending of boundaries into the inner space of the body leads to an intense experiencing of material and immaterial embodiment. This condition of inner sensation is found to correspond to the condition of the living body that is both flesh and emotion.

Chapter 3 deals with the notion of space and containment. The body is simultaneously contained by exterior space and container of inner space. The dissolution of boundaries and the merging of spaces lead to a crucial moment of definition between states of being. The body is realized as an embodied consciousness that includes matter and psyche.

Chapter 4 identifies the value of boundaries in the act of transcending these. The expanding and shifting of boundaries is reflective of the body transforming and moving towards a deeper understanding of embodied being. The concept of the 'body' being both matter and psyche is ultimately realized as a condition of human bodily being.

Chapter 1- Ambiguous Boundaries

Within the experience of viewing a work of art, there is a confrontation between two separate entities; art object and viewer. As the relationship between them is being formulated, the notion of boundaries comes into play. Antony Gormley, whose work is concerned with edges and boundaries, says that edges "... both define and release us."⁵ This is a critical statement for it alludes to the fact that boundaries are not rigid and fixed but rather ambiguous and elusive. Firstly, however, it is necessary to give a general definition as to what constitutes the term 'boundaries'. Barry Smith writes:

We most commonly demarcate reality along what we might call natural... boundaries. The most prominent... examples of such natural boundaries are the outer boundaries of objects in space... The natural boundary of you is (roughly speaking) the surface of your skin.⁶

Thus, generally speaking, boundaries or edges are what naturally differentiate and define the body from objects and the surrounding space. However, the notion of the edges as being a mere outline or surface, is unsatisfactory when examined at any other level. As Darian Leader points out, "... if an edge is supposed to tell us where a body ends and something else begins, it does this with ambiguity."⁷ Gormley senses this ambiguous nature and is consciously trying to deal with these ideas within his art. His work moved

⁵ Antony Gormley quoted in Darian Leader, 'Drawing in Space' in Making Space-Antony Gormley [exhibition cat.], (UK: Hand Books, 2004), p.66

⁶ Barry Smith, 'Truth and the Visual Field' in Bernard Pachoud, Jean Petitot, Jean-Michel Roy, and, Francisco J. Varela (eds.), Naturalizing Phenomenology and Cognitive Science- Issues in Contemporary Phenomenology and Cognitive Science, (U.S.A.: Stanford University Press,1999), p.320

⁷ Darian Leader, 'Drawing in Space' in Making Space-Antony Gormley [exhibition cat.], (UK: Hand Books, 2004), p.66

gradually from exploring empty, hollow spaces imprinted by the body (e.g. 'Bed'), (fig.1) to exploring solid body forms. With his solid works Gormley realized that he "... could now tackle the 'other side' of the body's boundary and actually construct the space where the body had been... The contained space was now filled, giving the solid, massy figures of the body form series."⁸ (e.g. 'Lost Subject I'), (fig.2) However, what is significant is that these lead bodies incorporate precise and unambiguous boundaries. The sculptural bodies are clearly defined within the space by a continuous line and surface that encircles and contains them. The idea of a single line being sufficient in separating a body from the surrounding space is a challenging one. Gormley feels inclined to proceed to a more in depth exploration of these concepts within his piece 'Domain Field'. (fig.3) The difference with his previous work lies in the fact that there is no single, continuous line or surface that describes and encompasses the body form. Instead, the 'Domain' sculptures are built up from a multitude of lines.⁹ (fig.4) As a result they lack a clear, defined outline. They are still recognizable as human figures but with no comforting continuous line encircling them. In viewing the sculptures, the viewer is thus made conscious of something that is out of the ordinary. The viewer is made aware of his/her own physical body as having a clear outline that separates it from the surroundings. In contrast, the figures draw attention to the fact that boundaries are not always clear and precise. This causes the viewer to experience a disruption of normality which causes a certain discomfort. According to Darian Leader, humans generally have the tendency to seek outlines in their surroundings as a means of feeling secure:

⁸ Darian Leader, 'Drawing in Space' in Making Space-Antony Gormley [exhibition cat.], (UK: Hand Books, 2004), p.64

⁹ Ibid. p.67

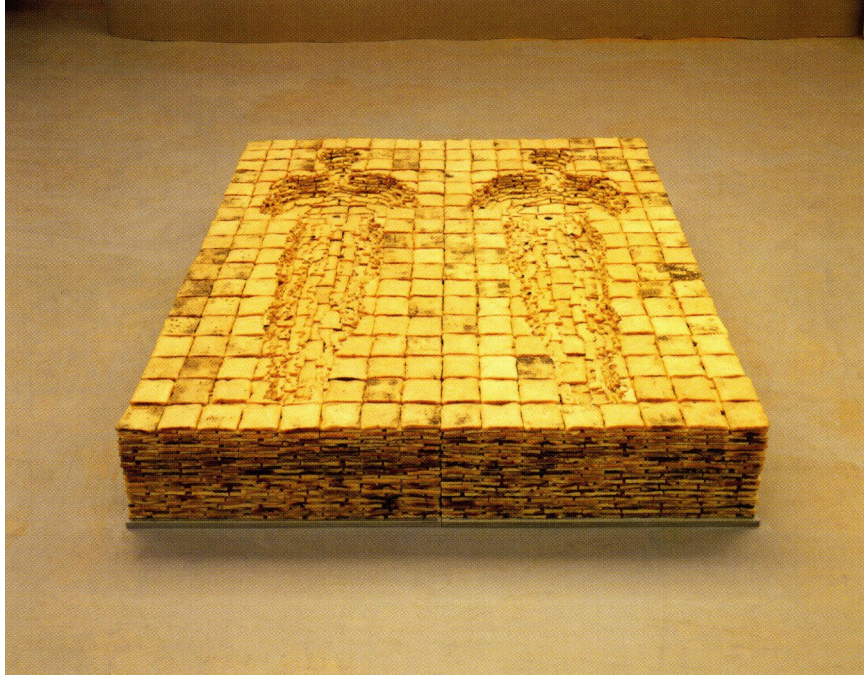


fig.1



fig.2



fig.3

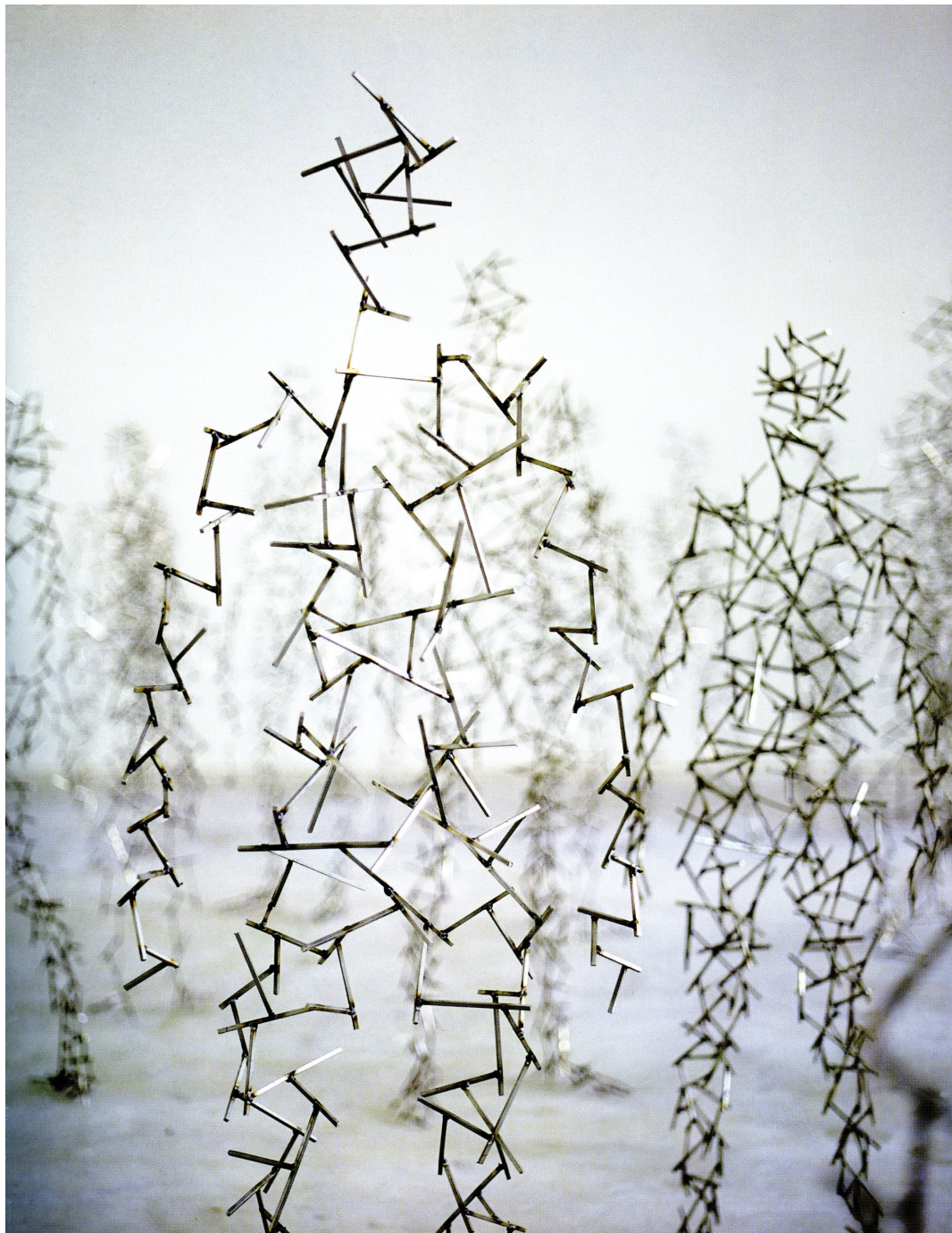


fig.4

Edges and boundaries are what we search for repeatedly in the visual field... Many people indulge in the... activity... of tracing lines mentally around the form of some object, be it a piece of furniture or another person's face. These tracings are a way of making enclosures, and hence count, perhaps, as a style of defense. We look for enclosure, a space bound by unbroken lines.¹⁰

However, the 'Domain' sculptures have the opposite effect as they have no clear outline to them. Darian Leader identifies the difference in Gormley's previous pieces: "... in the earlier work... lines are used to enclose and contain... in the Domain sculptures... they constitute the body without bounding it."¹¹ This passage contains a crucial idea. While presenting something that is out of the ordinary, the artwork simultaneously presents the viewer with an alternative. It suggests a new way of being within the space where the body is not merely seen a separate object within it but rather has a more open relationship to its surroundings. Thomas Baldwin refers to Merleau-Ponty's claim that art serves the purpose of helping us 'rediscover the world':

... for Merleau-Ponty, the 'natural attitude' of common sense leads us to overlook the phenomenon of the perceived world... senses... organize experience in such a way that it presents to us a world of things arrayed before us in a three-dimensional objective space within which we are located as just another object... Hence to rediscover and articulate it, we have somehow to get a detached, 'sideways', look at ordinary experience, and this is what... art and phenomenological philosophy make possible.¹²

¹⁰ Darian Leader, 'Drawing in Space' in Making Space-Antony Gormley [exhibition cat.], (UK: Hand Books, 2004), p.66

¹¹ Ibid. p.67

¹² Thomas Baldwin, 'Introduction' in Maurice Merleau-Ponty, The World of Perception, (London: Routledge, 2004), p.12

The ‘Domain’ pieces cause the viewer to experience or rediscover the body on a different level. Initially, they make the viewer conscious of his/her own physicality within the space. What is important though is that this heightened sense of embodiment is not felt as a purely physical sensation. It is simultaneously felt within the realm of emotions. Specifically, this interplay between the two realms has a fluid and reciprocal nature where one informs and affects the other. On a physical level, the viewer feels the limits and constraints that matter places upon his/her own body. One can feel the body as being a separate entity through its clear outline, shape, surface, weight and its general physical constitution. By looking at the sculptures that are merging with their surroundings one is reminded of one’s body’s separateness. This triggers a reaction wherein the viewer contemplates and even longs for the openness displayed by the sculptural figures. The psyche thus transcends matter in an attempt to merge with the surroundings on an emotional level. By escaping the constraints of pure physicality the viewer is however, once again made aware of his/her own physical body. It is a consciousness that regards the body not as mere matter but a combination of flesh and emotion. As explained by Husserlian phenomenology, “... we do not apprehend our body as an external reality among others, but as something we are and live, as what Husserl terms with the appropriate German word *Leib*.”¹³ Husserl, “... does not deny that we can also apprehend our body as mere object...”¹⁴, in which case “... our body is not apprehended as a *Leib* anymore but as a mere *Körper*.”¹⁵ What is crucial is to note how the experience of viewing the ‘Domain’ precisely allows for the viewer to experience

¹³ Bernard Pachoud, Jean Petitot, Jean-Michel Roy, and, Francisco J. Varela (eds.), Naturalizing Phenomenology and Cognitive Science- Issues in Contemporary Phenomenology and Cognitive Science, (U.S.A.: Stanford University Press,1999), p.35

¹⁴ Ibid. p.35

¹⁵ Ibid. p.35 - ‘Körper’ is the german word for body.

his/her body as *Leib*, 'something we are and live', meaning both flesh and emotion. The concept of the 'body' thus encompasses both matter and psyche that incorporate a complex and ambiguous relationship.

Chapter 2- Bodies concealed

The previous chapter explored the way the viewer's sense of embodiment is heightened in both its material and immaterial dimension. This experience was triggered by the alteration of the line of the 'Domain' sculptures. Thus the merging of the boundaries was essentially implemented through an alteration of the exterior natural boundaries of the sculptural object. However, in order to proceed even further, it is important to expand on the notion of natural boundaries as also being identified within the body. Barry Smith clarifies "... we can also recognize internal natural boundaries- for example the boundaries around your heart, lungs, and other organs."¹⁶ Of course, these boundaries cannot be seen as they lie concealed within the body. In order to expand on this notion of the interiority of the body it is necessary to refer to the work of Anish Kapoor.

Kapoor's work also manages to draw the attention of the viewer to his/her own embodiment within the space. As the viewer approaches the colored mirrors, (e.g. 'Alba') (fig.5), he/she initially sees both a reflection of him/herself and of the room behind. Subsequently, the boundaries of the viewer's body seem to dissolve as the reflected images merge with one another. In this sense the 'body' is experienced as a consciousness that is able to vacillate between the material and the immaterial.¹⁷ Eckhard Schneider explains:

¹⁶ Barry Smith, 'Truth and the Visual Field' in Bernard Pachoud, Jean Petitot, Jean-Michel Roy, and, Francisco J. Varela (eds.), Naturalizing Phenomenology and Cognitive Science- Issues in Contemporary Phenomenology and Cognitive Science, (U.S.A.: Stanford University Press,1999), p.320

¹⁷ Eckhard Schneider (ed.), Anish Kapoor-My Red Homeland [exhibition cat.], (Germany: Kunsthaus Bregenz, 2003), p.23

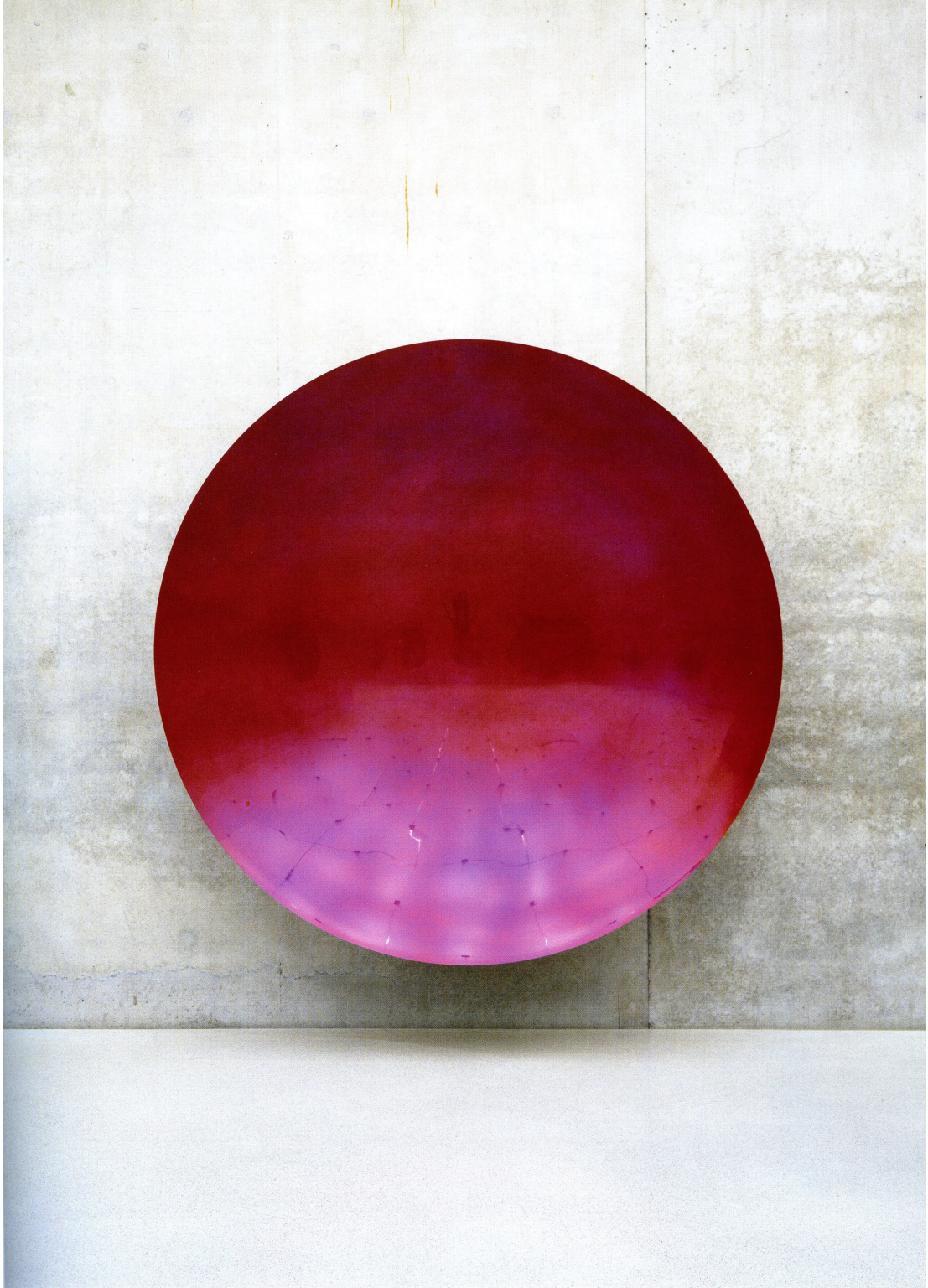


fig.5

This interplay between... the object and... awareness of the own self... becomes... a test case for the beholder's own consciousness... Kapoor... gives him a view of himself and the world, as though it were possible to look in both directions simultaneously... this allows him to take the material and the immaterial as having equal structural value in a complex reality.¹⁸

What the viewer sees as he/she approaches the mirror piece, is a visual merging of lines and shapes into one image that simultaneously contains the body and the surroundings. However, in order to take matters even further, it is necessary to discuss another element which is integral to Kapoor's work; colour and its meaning. As the viewer moves in closer proximity to the piece there is a point where the reflected reality vanishes and all that remains is colour.¹⁹ Schneider describes the experience:

... an all embracing tide of colour... almost completely envelopes the beholder... in this totality of colour sensation, the beholder experiences a simultaneity of fullness (colour) and void (the extinguished reality) in a state of critical balance... Anish Kapoor has constituted a precisely constructed space consisting of... physical/emotional proximity... the beholder becomes aware of the concealment of the bodies...²⁰

The viewer thus experiences the body both in its physical and emotional capacity. The critical part of the above passage however, lies in the phrase 'concealment of the bodies'. The notion of interiority of bodies is integral within the mind and body issue. In order to elaborate on this notion, it is necessary to highlight an important difference between the

¹⁸ Eckhard Schneider (ed.), *Anish Kapoor-My Red Homeland [exhibition cat.]*, (Germany: Kunsthaus Bregenz, 2003), p.24

¹⁹ Ibid. p.23

²⁰ Ibid. pp.23-24

works of Gormley and Kapoor. As seen, in both the ‘Domain’ sculptures and ‘Alba’, there is a merging of the material and immaterial dimension of the ‘body’. In the ‘Domain’ pieces, however, the sculptures merge with the surrounding space through the disruption of the exterior outline of the body. Subsequently, the viewer’s body transcends boundaries in order to merge with the exterior space. Likewise, Kapoor’s pieces also allow the body to merge with the surrounding space by dissolving the exterior lines of the body. Beyond a specific point however, these outlines vanish completely, leaving the viewer enveloped purely by color. No longer are there any discernable limits or points of reference as to where the body’s boundaries may lie. The use of colour is thus critical in Kapoor’s work. Eckhard Schneider comments on Kapoor’s use of colour: “Colour was to be a core component of his material, not mere surface. It was to establish spatial qualities, and indeed be itself a space.”²¹ Merleau-Ponty also draws attention to the functions of colour by mentioning Cézanne’s paintings in which he creates the outline and shape of the objects he paints through colour.²² In other words, the objects occupy or contain spaces of colour. Cézanne himself maintains that “Nature is on the inside.”²³ Merleau-Ponty explains further: “Quality, colour, light, depth which are there before us, are there only because they awaken an echo in our body and because the body welcomes them.”²⁴ Deriving from Eckhard’s as well as Cézanne’s comments, things start to fall into place. If the mirror pieces lead the viewer to be enveloped by colour, and colour itself is space,

²¹ Eckhard Schneider (ed.), *Anish Kapoor-My Red Homeland [exhibition cat.]*, (Germany: Kunsthaus Bregenz, 2003), p.22

²² Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The World of Perception*, (London: Routledge, 2004), p.18

²³ Paul Cezanné quoted in Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Primacy of Perception-And Other Essays on Phenomenological Psychology, the Philosophy of Art, History and Politics*, (U.S.A.: Northwestern University Press, 1989), p.164

²⁴ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Primacy of Perception-And Other Essays on Phenomenological Psychology, the Philosophy of Art, History and Politics*, (U.S.A.: Northwestern University Press, 1989), p.164

then it follows that essentially the viewer is transcending boundaries into this space of colour. Moreover, colour is, as Cezanne suggested, encountered in the exterior world and ultimately embedded as sensation deep within the body. Following this line of thought, it can be deduced that by entering the space of colour, the viewer enters in essence an interior space of sensation. In this way, Kapoor's work allows the viewer to merge with the exterior space and also simultaneously enter an interior realm of the body. It is both the physical body and the psyche that transcend these boundaries and ultimately enter this space of inner sensation. This position is a complex one as it corresponds to the whole issue of division between mind and body. Kapoor helps shine some light on this issue of the material and immaterial merging within the interiority of the body. He talks about the significance of colour in his work; he specifically mentions the colour red: "If I make a red work... the colour... isn't a covering; it is a condition..."²⁵

The notion of colour being a 'condition' is a critical one that needs to be elaborated upon. In order to delve deeper into this matter, it is important to investigate another piece by Kapoor entitled 'My Red Homeland'. This piece was comprised of 25 tons of red vaseline which was continuously being ploughed by a metal plough in the shape of a precise orbit.²⁶ (fig.6) What is striking in this piece is once again the overwhelming sensation of colour. As with the mirror pieces, 'My Red Homeland' creates a space of interiority for the viewer to enter. It is critical, however, to further investigate how the element of colour triggers sensations within the body that operate both on a physical and emotional level. Eckhard Schneider contemplates on the power of the colour red:

²⁵ Martin Gayford, 'Interview-Martin Gayford with Anish Kapoor: Looking in', *Modern Painters*, 13, No.1, (2000), p.100

²⁶ Eckhard Schneider (ed.), *Anish Kapoor-My Red Homeland [exhibition cat.]*, (Germany: Kunsthaus Bregenz, 2003), p.25



fig.6

...The soft, thick flood of red, oscillating between translucent and opaque determines all perception and emotion with its all-over colour. So completely is the spectator abandoned to the physical and emotional pull of the colour that the diffusely romantic distance between eye and object which was still to be found in the mirror works has been completely ousted by the radical presence of the object.²⁷

The envelopment of the viewer within the colour sensation is thus a much more powerful and whole experience than in the mirror pieces. When reading Eckhard's description of the red vaseline, what comes to mind is an image of blood; the blood that flows through one's body. The redness of the vaseline, the consistency of it, as well as its continuous flow, remind one of bodily functions. (fig.7) The body is thus realized as matter that is comprised of internal organs and fluids. The body is sensed within its physicality; however, even more so, matter is felt as something animate as the body is alive. Eckhard succinctly writes: "... My 'Red Homeland' is overwhelming by virtue of the physical proximity of this sheer mass of red Vaseline in all its rawness... We are involved as witnesses of an immense act of shaping, conceived as a never-ending... process..."²⁸ In this sense 'My Red Homeland' is not only reminiscent of one's bodily functions but also of the process of living itself. What is striking about the piece is the rawness of it, the emotion that the red vaseline exudes. In essence, the rawness of the material corresponds to the rawness of the process of living. The body is alive and functioning both in its material and immaterial dimension, as both flesh and emotion.

²⁷ Eckhard Schneider (ed.), Anish Kapoor-My Red Homeland [exhibition cat.], (Germany: Kunsthaus Bregenz, 2003), p.28

²⁸Ibid. p.25



fig.7

The 'condition' of colour that Kapoor spoke of, is essentially the condition of the living body. The 'body' thus constitutes a corporeal condition, one that includes both matter and psyche. As Kapoor explains of the colour red within his work: "... it is more than just a colour... it possesses a corporeal quality... it is psychologically the most intentional one, by virtue of its reference to an inner realm."²⁹ Eckhard Schneider comments: "Kapoor... is out for more than the mere factual phenomenon of a unified whole of colour, space and material. He is also interested in a complex simultaneity of... reason and emotion..."³⁰ Exterior and interior space are thus simultaneously entered by the viewer and the 'body' is experienced as a merging of matter and psyche.

²⁹'Chroma: Passages through Color-selected extracts from artist's written work' in Barbara Rose, Monochromes- From Malevich to the Present, (USA: University of California Press, 2006), p.221

³⁰ Eckhard Schneider (ed.), Anish Kapoor-My Red Homeland [exhibition cat.], (Germany: Kunsthaus Bregenz, 2003), p.23

Chapter 3- Containment: contained and containing

It is clear so far that within the experience of viewing the artwork the viewer is made conscious of his/her 'body' in both its materiality and immateriality. However, the complex manner in which matter triggers emotion and vice versa, how psyche helps realize flesh is a highly complex relationship that needs to be elaborated upon. Elizabeth Grosz writes: "the mind/body opposition has always been correlated with a number of other oppositional pairs... outside and inside..."³¹ In essence, the relationship between inside and outside is of a fluid and reciprocal nature, reflective of the relationship that exists between matter and psyche.

Here, it is necessary to refer to the notion of space and containment. Within viewing the artwork mentioned, the 'body' is able to access different spaces. Boundaries are transcended; both exterior ones that separate viewer from surrounding space and interior ones. What is significant is to note how the exterior space is the space that contains the viewer while the interior space is the space contained by the viewer. Mark Johnson talks about the body's experience of physical containment:

Our encounter with containment and boundedness is one of the most pervasive features of our bodily experience. We are intimately aware of our bodies as three-dimensional containers into which we put certain things (food, water, air) and out of which other things emerge (food and water wastes, air, blood etc.)... we

³¹Elizabeth Grosz quoted in Stephen David Ross, The Gift of Touch: embodying the Good, (U.S.A.: State University of New York Press, 1998), p.221

experience constant physical containment in our surroundings (those things that envelope us). We move in and out of rooms, clothes, vehicles...³²

Furthermore:

...in our many experiences of being *in* something... we find recurring... structures: the experiential basis for *in-out* orientation is that of spatial boundedness. The most experientially salient sense of boundedness seems to be that of three-dimensional containment (i.e., being limited or held within some three-dimensional enclosure, such as a womb, a crib, or a room).³³

Containment is thus a concept that is intertwined with the notion of space and boundaries. Bodies both move in and out of space and similarly things move in and out of bodies. In this sense, bodies are both contained and containers of space. What needs to be stressed however, at this point, is how Johnson is referring specifically to the condition of physical containment. As mentioned, Merleau-Ponty talks extensively about the notion of embodiment. Dermot Moran refers to Merleau-Ponty's investigations on the "... relation of consciousness to the body..."³⁴ and the nature of "... embodied being in the world."³⁵ Significantly, Merleau-Ponty rejected traditional philosophical dualisms of soul and body in favor of a more fluid and reciprocal relationship between the two.³⁶ He characterizes embodiment to be at its core 'mysterious', 'paradoxical' and 'ambiguous'.³⁷ Moran alludes to the complexity of the experience of human embodiment; he writes based on

³² Mark Johnson, *The Body in the Mind- The Bodily Basis of Meaning, Imagination and Reason*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1990), p.21

³³ Ibid. pp.21-22

³⁴ Dermot Moran, *Introduction to Phenomenology*, (UK:Routledge, 2006), p.13

³⁵ Ibid. p.13

³⁶ Ibid. p.401

³⁷ Ibid. p.391

Merleau-Ponty's stance: "... our physical body is not experienced by us as an object among other objects in space... we don't just take up space, we *inhabit* it, we relate to it..."³⁸ In this sense, the body does not contain space and is not contained by space in a purely physical manner. Rather, the notion of space and containment is much more complex and ambiguous.

In order to delve deeper into this issue it is critical at this point to refer to Anish Kapoor's piece 'Marsyas'. 'Marsyas' was a huge sculpture that stretched over the vast exhibition hall of Tate Modern. (fig.8) It had three vast funnels/openings that left viewers unsure of where the interior and the exterior of the piece started and ended.³⁹ Thomas Zaunschirm writes on the piece: "... by opening up the figure to create gaping apertures at either end and onto the raised viewing platform below... an interior-exterior orientation was no longer possible. Visitors cannot take in the outer form of the work in its entirety from any angle".⁴⁰ The viewer is thus left vacillating between the interior and exterior space of the sculpture. Space contained and space that contains are no longer easy to define or to separate from each other. Marina Warner describes the effect the piece has on the viewer: "When 'the space within is bigger than the space as seemingly defined by the outside,' (Kapoor quoted), the sense of your own corporeality changes and the contours of each observer's body may be undone: a kind of pleasurable dissolution of the container."⁴¹ Thus, the merging of interior and exterior space of the sculpture subsequently leads the body of the viewer to experience a similar merging. The body

³⁸ Dermot Moran, Introduction to Phenomenology, (UK:Routledge, 2006), pp.423-424

³⁹ Thomas Zaunschirm, 'The Domain of the Marsyas' in Eckhard Schneider (ed.), Anish Kapoor-My Red Homeland [exhibition cat.], (Germany: Kunsthaus Bregenz, 2003), p.148

⁴⁰ Ibid. p.148

⁴¹ Marina Warner, 'Anish Kapoor: The Perforate Self is or Nought is not Naught', Parkett, 69, (2003), p.130



fig.8

dissolves into space and space dissolves into the body. The body is no longer strictly container or contained but rather both. The viewer thus experiences a heightened sense of embodiment in which the body has a more fluid and reciprocal relationship with space; space flows in and out of the body as the body floats in and out of space. In this sense, we can start to better understand Moran describing our relation to the space as being ambiguous; "... we *inhabit* it, we relate to it."⁴² The dissolution of the body as a container and the merging of exterior and interior are not experienced however, as a mere physical sensation. It is critical to note how the notion of 'inhabiting' and 'relating' to space suggests that the psyche also forms a fluid relationship to space. The material body that contains and is contained by space is also an immaterial body. Elizabeth Grosz explains:

The body is a most peculiar "thing," for it is never quite reducible to being merely a thing... it is both a thing and a nonthing, an object, but an object which somehow contains or coexists with an interiority... Human bodies... stretch and extend the notion of physicality... they are materialities that are uncontainable in physicalist terms alone.⁴³

Bodies are not pure materialities but rather entities of matter and psyche. They cannot be thus described as being contained or containers of space in a purely physical manner. The body is both a 'thing' and a 'nonthing', simultaneously material and immaterial. This paradox is deeply embedded within the relationship that exists between the exterior and the interior realm of the body. Merleau-Ponty comments on how the body is part of the exterior world and investigates the term 'flesh'. Dermot Moran refers to Merleau-Ponty's

⁴² Dermot Moran, *Introduction to Phenomenology*, (UK:Routledge, 2006), p.424

⁴³ Elizabeth Grosz quoted in Stephen David Ross, *The Gift of Touch: embodying the Good*, (U.S.A.: State University of New York Press, 1998), p.219

position on the "... experience of flesh. Things are encrusted in the flesh of the body, just as the body is part of the... world. The term 'flesh' is to indicate... a surface which has an inside...where the inside and the outside meet..."⁴⁴ 'Flesh' is thus not regarded as just physical substance. More critically, it is apprehended as the meeting point between the interior and exterior space. Thomas Zaunschirm writes about 'Marsyas': "... only the boundary between interior and exterior remains."⁴⁵ It is significant that within the process of the exterior and the interior merging, the boundary remains present. 'Marsyas' was made out of a fine, taut, PVC membrane that bore resemblance to skin and flesh.⁴⁶ The use of this specific material had a deep impact on the viewer; Thomas Zaunschirm describes: "'Marsyas' left the... spectator looking upwards into the *gaping maw of red skin...*"⁴⁷ (fig.9), he also adds: "... this red-veined skin... the tightly spanned membrane... is... quick with life..."⁴⁸ The nature of the material, as well as its colour, give the piece a feeling of fleshiness. The surface of the sculpture is reminiscent of the skin that envelops the body. The viewer is thus reminded of the body as being flesh; flesh that is however 'quick with life'. Ultimately, the body is sensed as being alive and animate. By extension, it is thus felt as corporeality comprised of matter and psyche. This was something that was also touched upon within the piece 'My Red Homeland'. At this point, however, we are led to delve deeper into the notion of containment.

The viewer becomes aware of his/her body as being simultaneously a container of life and contained by it. In this sense, the viewer is connected to very core of life itself, the

⁴⁴ Dermot Moran, *Introduction to Phenomenology*, (UK:Routledge, 2006), p.429

⁴⁵ Thomas Zaunschirm, 'The Domain of the Marsyas' in Eckhard Schneider (ed.), *Anish Kapoor-My Red Homeland [exhibition cat.]*, (Germany: Kunsthaus Bregenz, 2003), p.149

⁴⁶ *Ibid.* pp.148-149

⁴⁷ *Ibid.* p.151

⁴⁸ *Ibid.* p.149

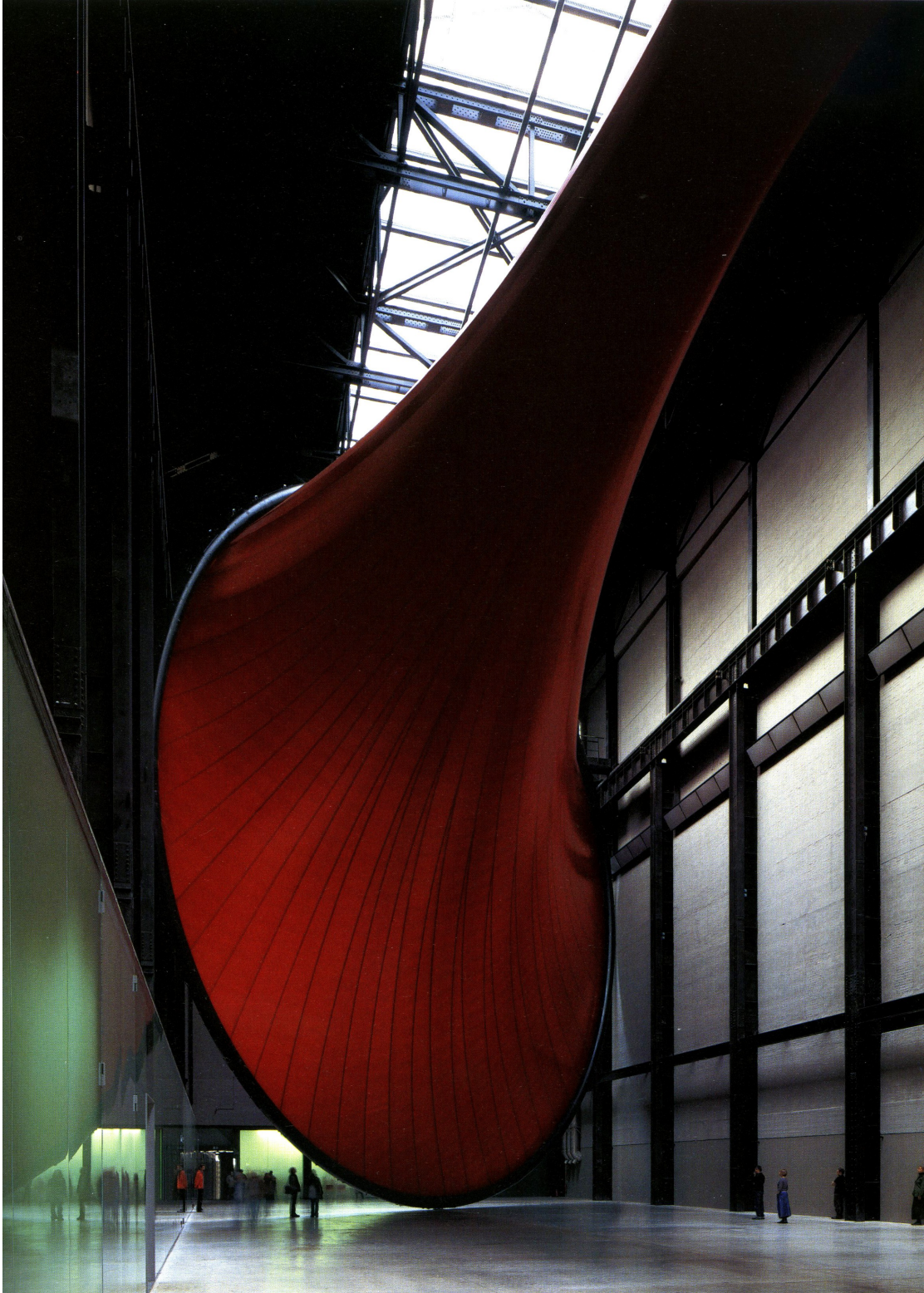


fig.9

process of becoming part of the exterior and the interior world. ‘Marsyas’ bears strong associations to this process of coming into being. Marina Warner succinctly describes how ‘Marsyas’ essentially reminds one of one’s own experience of emergence into *being*:

The visceral vibrations of Kapoor’s aesthetic strike resonances with processes of emergence, with the enfleshment of all bodies, and above all with the maternal body as the vessel in which all bodies are formed and from which they make their own entrance, often upside down, bloody and howling.⁴⁹

This passage demonstrates how the experience of coming into being is both a physical and emotional one: “... bodies... make their... entrance... *bloody and howling*.”⁵⁰ (my italics) Coming into being is thus marked from the start by the material and the immaterial. ‘Marsyas’ thus leads the body to be experienced as the ‘body’ wherein matter and psyche meet and merge into one another. The exterior and the interior flow into one another, space is no longer strictly confined as boundaries are fluid and can be transcended. The skin or boundary of ‘Marsyas’ is all that remains between the two realms that are no longer separate. It is not so much a tangible skin as a boundary between the outside and the inside. Kapoor elaborates: “Skin... resists visualization: it constitutes a boundary in itself... eludes delineating”⁵¹ Furthermore, he explains that he tries to “... to make a skin that is not a cover... The skin that I try to talk about is one that is less tangible...”⁵² What Kapoor is essentially talking about is the skin as the meeting point between the exterior and the interior realm of the body. Kapoor delves deeper into

⁴⁹ Marina Warner, ‘Anish Kapoor: The Perforate Self is or Nought is not Naught’, *Parkett*, 69, (2003), p.131

⁵⁰ *Ibid.* p.131

⁵¹ *Ibid.* p.129

⁵² Sherry Gaché, ‘Interview: Anish Kapoor’, *Sculpture*, 15, No.2, (1996), p.23

the matter: “There can’t be an exterior without an interior. My work, if it’s about anything is about the skin- the skin in between exterior and interior... The surface, I mean literally the skin... is the moment of... definition between one state of being and another state of being.”⁵³

What is crucial about Kapoor’s statements is that boundaries have to exist in order for there to be an exterior and an interior space. However, this boundary can be transcended as these two realms meet and merge into one another. Most importantly though, the skin as the in-between boundary, is the moment of definition between two states of being. The body exists as matter and also as psyche; however the moment these two states meet in consciousness is a moment of definition. It is an experiencing of becoming, of realizing the body as being both material and immaterial. The realization of the co-existence of states of being, eventually leads to a more complete state of being. Warner describes the experience within viewing ‘Marsyas’: “Looking at MARSYAS... was an experience that both amplified you and perforated you... you could feel your thought fall into its spaces, experience your body... and the edges of consciousness moved through space...”⁵⁴ It is thus an experience that leads to a deeper understanding of “...human bodily being-in- the world.”⁵⁵ In this sense, bodies are left to move freely in between spaces and states of being. Ultimately, the ‘body’ is a state of being wherein the material and immaterial body belongs to both the exterior and interior realm.

⁵³ Sherry Gaché, ‘Interview: Anish Kapoor’, *Sculpture*, 15, No.2, (1996), p.22

⁵⁴ Marina Warner, ‘Anish Kapoor: The Perforate Self is or Nought is not Naught’, *Parkett*, 69, (2003), pp.130-131

⁵⁵ Dermot Moran, *Introduction to Phenomenology*, (UK: Routledge, 2006), p.434

Chapter 4 – Becoming

Leonardo da Vinci stated “... the boundaries of the body are the least of all things”⁵⁶, adding that “... the truth of this is proven by the fact that the boundary of a substance is a surface which is neither part of the body contained within that surface nor part of the air surrounding that body...”⁵⁷ His statement appears at first glance to be devaluating the importance of boundaries. However, in essence, what is being alluded to is the complexity and ambiguity of boundaries. Darian Leader succinctly writes in reference to Da Vinci’s position: “An edge as such is thus no simple matter.”⁵⁸ More critically though, the value of them lies beyond their mere existence; the boundaries themselves are “... the least of all things...”⁵⁹ Essentially, what is important is their fluid nature which allows bodies to move in between spaces and states. Another statement by Judith Butler helps investigate this idea: “bodies tend to indicate a world beyond themselves, but this movement beyond their own boundaries, a movement of boundary itself, appeared to be quite central to what bodies ‘are.’”⁶⁰ This passage highlights several important points that need to be further analyzed. Bodies encompass an interior world and also belong to the exterior world. Most critically though, it is the act of moving between spaces, in other words the transcending of the boundaries itself that is “... central to what bodies ‘are.’”⁶¹

⁵⁶ Leonardo da Vinci quoted in Darian Leader, ‘Drawing in Space’ in Making Space-Antony Gormley [exhibition cat.], (UK: Hand Books, 2004), p.66

⁵⁷ Ibid. p.66

⁵⁸ Darian Leader, ‘Drawing in Space’ in Making Space-Antony Gormley [exhibition cat.], (UK: Hand Books, 2004), p.66

⁵⁹ Leonardo da Vinci quoted in Darian Leader, ‘Drawing in Space’ in Making Space-Antony Gormley [exhibition cat.], (UK: Hand Books, 2004), p.66

⁶⁰ Judith Butler quoted in Stephen Davies Ross, The Gift of Touch: embodying the Good, (U.S.A.: State University of New York Press, 1998), p.251

⁶¹ Ibid. p.251

The notion of the movement in relation to bodies is a crucial one that needs to be investigated further. Darian Leader touches upon these concepts in talking about Gormley's work. He specifically refers to the act of drawing the figure. Within this process there is often a restriction of movement as he explains:

When we draw a figure bounded by a continuous line, we both create and enclose a surface. But often, once the enclosure is complete, we trace the bounding line again and again... the bounding lines become repeated not just to define but to reinforce the limits of the body...⁶²

In other words, by outlining the figure, it is not only given form, it is also bound and confined to its form. Antony Gormley has been preoccupied with exploring the notion of the body being limited and restricted.⁶³ In a drawing called 'Exercise Between Blood and Earth' (fig. 10), he repeated the silhouette of a running man both inside and outside the delineated form.⁶⁴ This drawing can be seen as a conscious effort on behalf of the body to start resisting confinement within rigid boundaries. Even though the lines control the scope of movement, the body is nonetheless moving. This drawing eventually led to the three-dimensional pieces of Gormley's 'Expansion' series; 'Still Running' (fig.11), 'Earth', 'Body' and 'Fruit' (fig.12), and, 'Still Leaping'. These sculptures contain within the figure of a body caught in mid-movement. The human form has however been extended by

⁶²Darian Leader, 'Drawing in Space' in Making Space-Antony Gormley [exhibition cat.], (UK: Hand Books, 2004), p.67

⁶³ Ibid. p.67

⁶⁴ Antony Gormley, 'Making the Expansion Works' in Making Space-Antony Gormley [exhibition cat.], (UK: Hand Books, 2004), p.182

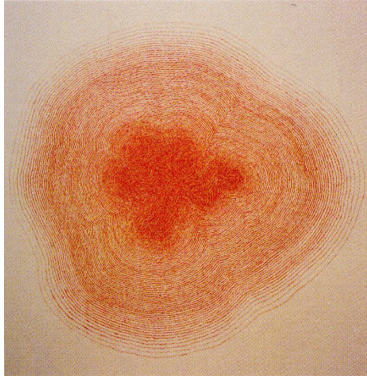


fig.10



fig.11



fig.12

attaching sticks of equal length all around it.⁶⁵ (fig.13 & 14) This leads the sculpture to attain a different exterior form. Thus, the conventional form of the human body is transformed into a different one. (fig.15) Essentially, the ‘Expansion’ works, take, as Gormley explains, “... moving bodies either in self-locomotion... or in positions where the body is the inert subject of movement...”⁶⁶ and “... transform them into a... different form of motion...”⁶⁷ It is thus evident that the ‘Expansion’ works try and defy the notion of the conventional outline that encircles and binds the human body. They take the general outline of the human body but by extending it, eventually transform it into a different form. What is critical about this process is that the alteration of the human shape is more than an alteration of form. Essentially, it constitutes a shifting of boundaries. The body, even as it is contained within, is moving towards a different state of being. Gormley explains that the ‘Expansion’ series express an obsession with boundaries, “... with renegotiating the skin: asking where things... begin and end...”⁶⁸ Essentially, what is being renegotiated, are the boundaries of the body. Even more specifically, what is being challenged is their capacity for movement and change.

Significantly, the ‘Expansion’ pieces investigate the notion of the body’s boundaries ‘expanding’. The forms begin with the body that is contained and confined within, suspended in mid-motion. However, the body is resting confinement which causes the form to swell up around the body. This swelling or widening, essentially, the expansion of boundaries, does not only occur in relation to the exterior form. There is a sense of

⁶⁵ Antony Gormley, ‘Making the Expansion Works’ in Making Space-Antony Gormley [exhibition cat.], (UK: Hand Books, 2004), p.182

⁶⁶ Ibid. p.182

⁶⁷ Ibid. p.182

⁶⁸ Ibid. p.182



fig.13



fig.14



fig.15

movement and shifting also within the interiority of the sculptures. As forms, they exude a strong sense of life that is incubating within them. The body that is contained within is confined but it is nonetheless stirring, shifting and transforming. Gormley explains:

They all started with a will to express an expanding universe applied to the... zone of the body, but ended up... with strong associations with early single-cell life-forms or indeed our own bodies at the moment of cell division. They ask questions about where human life fits into the chain of being- between the... material ... and the... space... of ever widening relations.⁶⁹

The movement and transformation of the body is not only occurring in relation to the exterior form. Boundaries are also widening and moving within the interiority of the body. The body is thus expanding both outwardly and inwardly. This transcending of boundaries into outer and inner space heightens the viewer's sense of embodiment in its material and immaterial dimension. The body has a strong sense of becoming and being the 'body' wherein flesh and emotion meet and merge. Seen under this light, it starts to become clear how the movement of boundaries itself is crucial to "... what bodies 'are.'"⁷⁰ It is within the act of expansion that a sense of material and immaterial *being* starts to be realized.

In the 'Expansion' works the body is expanding from within the form to the point where the sculptures "... begin to resemble ripe fruits that can barely be contained within

⁶⁹ Antony Gormley, 'Making the Expansion Works' in Making Space-Antony Gormley [exhibition cat.], (UK: Hand Books, 2004), p.183

⁷⁰ Judith Butler quoted in Stephen David Ross, The Gift of Touch: embodying the Good, (U.S.A.: State University of New York Press, 1998), p.251

their skins... they are in transition, about to generate new life.”⁷¹ The body expands up to a certain limit which gives the sculptures their final exterior shape. In this sense, the transformation only reaches a specific stage and then comes to a standstill. Subsequently something is generated, something erupts from within but it does so in a ‘contained’ manner. Gormley characterizes these pieces as “... contained explosions.”⁷² Boundaries are shifting, moving outwards and inwards but ultimately only expand to a certain point. Thus the transformation of the body into a more complete state of being is not fully concluded. This process is reflective of the complexity of the mind and body issue. Gormley explains how the ‘Expansion’ pieces have a lot to do with the “... mind and its sensibilities not fitting comfortably in the skin.”⁷³ By investigating the relationship between flesh and emotion the notion of skin comes into play.

Skin or surface is, as Stuart Morgan mentions amongst other definitions, “... the envelope of the form... the surface which establishes the boundary...”⁷⁴ Furthermore, as explained by John Hutchinson, “...within the container of the skin lies... a plethora of feelings and emotions.”⁷⁵ The meeting of matter and psyche is a meeting of flesh and emotions, of the material and the immaterial. Ultimately, as already established, it is a moment of definition between two states of being. The ‘Expansion’ sculptures are examples of older works of Gormley that deal with these ideas. As his work progresses throughout the span of his career, it presents a deeper understanding of boundaries.

⁷¹ John Hutchinson, ‘Survey-Return(The Turning Point)’ in E. H. Gombrich, John Hutchinson, and, Lela B. Njatin, *Antony Gormley*, (London: Phaidon Press, 1995), p.91

⁷² Antony Gormley, ‘Making the Expansion Works’ in *Making Space-Antony Gormley [exhibition cat.]*, (UK: Hand Books, 2004), p.182

⁷³ Antony Gormley quoted in John Hutchinson, ‘Survey-Return(The Turning Point)’ in E. H. Gombrich, John Hutchinson, and, Lela B. Njatin, *Antony Gormley*, (London: Phaidon Press, 1995), p.91

⁷⁴ Stuart Morgan quoted in John Hutchinson, ‘Survey-Return(The Turning Point)’ in E. H. Gombrich, John Hutchinson, and, Lela B. Njatin, *Antony Gormley*, (London: Phaidon Press, 1995), p.72

⁷⁵ John Hutchinson, ‘Survey-Return(The Turning Point)’ in E. H. Gombrich, John Hutchinson, and, Lela B. Njatin, *Antony Gormley*, (London: Phaidon Press, 1995), p.75

Hutchinson describes: "...bodies freefloat, as if in a womb or in outer space... They... appear to have overcome the division between body and spirit."⁷⁶ In this sense, the fluid nature of the relationship of matter and psyche is fully realized within the body as bodies freely move between exteriority and interiority. However, it is significant, as Hutchinson mentions, that from early on, the works Gormley essentially reflect his "... desire... to explore... what it feels like *to be* human... to create... states of being..."⁷⁷ (my italics) What is extremely important about the 'Expansion' pieces is that they very clearly demonstrate these states of being. They encapsulate within the sculptural form, the human body that is caught in mid-motion, between states of being. The material and immaterial body is expanding towards a more complete state of being that incorporates both. What is significant, however, is that the body itself is not visible. The sculptural forms of the 'Expansion' pieces are changed to the point where the human form they enclose within is no longer detectable; they "... have barely any resemblance to the figures they 'contain'."⁷⁸ In this sense it is the very condition of *being* a body that is heightened within the viewer. As Hutchinson explains, "...the body is not so much seen from the outside as felt from the inside; expressive of the physical and spiritual experience of being embodied..."⁷⁹ Thus, the experience of physical and emotional embodiment is realized by the viewer as bodily sensation. Ultimately the concept of the 'body' is realized as a state of *bodily being* that includes the material and immaterial body.

⁷⁶ John Hutchinson, 'Survey-Return(The Turning Point)' in E. H. Gombrich, John Hutchinson, and, Lela B. Njatin, Antony Gormley, (London: Phaidon Press, 1995), p.75

⁷⁷ Ibid. p.75

⁷⁸ Ibid. p.56

⁷⁹ Ibid. p.51

Conclusion

In conclusion it is wise to once again refer to what Antony Gormley says about boundaries; that they "... both define and release us."⁸⁰ Boundaries are at their core ambiguous and paradoxical. On the one hand, they define the body in relation to exterior and interior space. On the other hand, they release the body by allowing it to move in-between spaces. Essentially, the body is moving between states of being, between its material and immaterial dimension. It is precisely within the act of transcending boundaries that the body's sense of embodiment is heightened. Critically, it is an experiencing of bodily sensation that includes both matter and psyche.

The condition of embodiment incorporates at its core a fluid and reciprocal relationship between mind and body. Merleau-Ponty was particularly influenced by Gabriel Marcel's claim that "... I do not so much *have* a body as... 'I *am* my body'."⁸¹ In this sense the concept of the 'body' cannot be distinct from either matter or psyche. 'Bodily being' is engendered within a corporeality that includes the physical body and the psyche. Ultimately, *being* is the condition of the living body that is both flesh and emotion.

Merleau-Ponty succinctly writes: "...I have no means of knowing the... body other than that of living in it... and losing myself in it. I am my body..."⁸² Essentially, boundaries need to shift in order for the body to be experienced as the 'body'; one must *live* and *lose* oneself within it. The artworks utilized in this thesis exemplify how the viewer is able to transcend boundaries into a more complete state of being. However, the

⁸⁰ Antony Gormley quoted in Darian Leader, 'Drawing in Space' in Making Space-Antony Gormley [exhibition cat.], (UK: Hand Books, 2004), p.66

⁸¹ Dermot Moran, Introduction to Phenomenology, (UK: Routledge, 2006), p.406

⁸² Maurice Merleau-Ponty quoted in Stephen Davies Ross, The Gift of Touch: embodying the Good, (U.S.A.: State University of New York Press, 1998), p.126

transformation into being the 'body' might not necessarily be fully concluded. Ultimately, the value of the artwork lies in the fact that it demonstrates the potential one holds for *becoming the 'body'*.

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