

Seeing and being Seen: The dialectics of intimate space and Anthony Gormley's 'Event Horizon'

In memory of Jonathon Phipps, founder of the Portland Sculpture Park

'A time may indeed come when the pictures and statues that we may admire today will crumble to dust...the value of all this beauty and perfection is determined only by its significance for our own emotional lives' (Sigmund Freud 'On Transience', 1915)

In this short paper Freud offered a strong argument for the acceptance of transience, that we need to accept the passing and destruction of all things including of course ourselves...Freud then goes on to say that the transience of beauty does not detract from its worth, - 'transience value is scarcity value in time' - but it is precisely this very element which makes it more precious to us. In addition, one might wonder about Freud's own struggles with personal transience and the contrary wish to be remembered: a feeling that personal annihilation means the death of the capacity to experience the beauty of the world, which might make it paradoxically easier to accept its transience. These thoughts have been in my mind in relation to a sculptural installation in Central London, in the summer of 2007, and what its appearance (and subsequent disappearance) provoked and evoked.

In May 2007 thirty-one life size iron male figures were placed on prominent buildings across London, in sites ranging from the Shell Centre and the National Theatre on the South Bank, to Waterloo Bridge and King's College, locations on either side of the river Thames. Their function was twofold: to be an installation in their own right, and to promote the sculptor Anthony Gormley's exhibition 'Blind Light' at the Hayward Gallery, scheduled to run till mid-August in the same year. All the statues were looking towards the gallery, from their various vantage points, as well as in some sense overlooking a whole section of the architecture in that region of London. They were immediately to become a talking point, and very soon a petition was being organised to send to Downing Street, asking that they stay in situ after the exhibition closed. This had already happened with a previous installation of Gormley's in 2005 called 'Another Place' on a beach near Liverpool, where despite a mixed reception by local people

(some of whom 'decorated' the statues with underwear and other pieces of clothing, calling it 'pornography on the beach'), some of the figures did finally find a permanent site there in March 2007, looking out to sea as the tide came and went on Crosby Beach.

As is well known, Anthony Gormley has been examining the potential of human form in sculpture for the last 25 years, with his own body as the medium for the investigation. He sees the body as a place of memory and transformation 'I am interested in the body because it is the place where emotions are most directly registered. When you feel frightened, when you feel excited, happy, depressed, somehow the body registers it'. This has links with Freud's idea that 'the body is first and foremost a bodily ego' which emphasises the psycho-somatic connection from the beginning. Students of Infant Observation have the opportunity and privilege to observe the development of the infant's personality and the ego from the beginning, through the bodily ministrations of the infant's caretakers as well as their mindful reflection on the infant's own states of mind. These body/mind services remain embedded in the personality, as Melanie Klein averred, as 'memories in feeling'. Gormley has also said that he sees sculpture as an act of faith in life, in its continuity-which is a somewhat different view from that expressed by Freud on transience almost 100 years previously, although one might think that these ideas are not mutually exclusive either.

The method by which the sculptures are produced starts by what would seem to be an endurance test on the part of the artist, as he has his naked body encased in cling-film and then jute scrim, except for a small hole through which he can breathe, and the scrim is then covered in plaster. This then has to harden before he can break free of the mould: a kind of birth in one sense. This mould is then used to make the metal figures. Gormley said in a television interview that he uses his own body, (which some have seen as being a narcissistic or an exhibitionist act), because it would be hard to ask others to endure this process. His view is that 'there are better ways of being vainglorious than making a few rusty, somewhat industrially produced clones that have no pretension to being idealised but just hang around'...Hang around they may do, and they also hang around in people's minds, in a way which Gormley clearly intended, despite this somewhat disingenuous statement. Some commentators have seen these figures to be a depiction of the body as a lonely self, vulnerable in its nakedness, lost, looking out for a meaning which never

perhaps arrives. This may indeed be part of the story. We are all perhaps looking for ‘Another Place’ - beyond the reality principle of our lives, some transforming truths which would ameliorate the pain of the human condition. In Freud’s paper he describes his conversation with the young Rilke ‘already a famous poet’, who is struggling with the idea of transition and transience. ‘The idea that all this beauty was transient was giving these two sensitive minds (*that also of Lou-Andreas Salome, Rilke’s companion*) a foretaste of mourning over its decease; and since the mind instinctively recoils from anything so painful, they felt their enjoyment of beauty was interfered with by thoughts of its transience’.

Cities now account for 50% of the world’s population. By locating his figures overlooking one of the world’s great cities, did Gormley articulate for us all a sense of searching, of looking over the ‘Event Horizon’ for something that we may not be able to begin to know about in words? Might this be a search for meaning, or conversely a search to evade the pain of meaning? Bollas(2000) talked of city architecture and its ‘play with life and death’: that buildings enhance the inorganic spaces they inhabit. In these figures presiding over the cityscape, there seemed to reside some juxtaposition between thoughts of life and death, of flying and falling.

I first saw one of Anthony Gormley’s works twenty years ago (and it is still there) carved on the side of a rock, in a sculpture park at Tout Quarry in Portland, Dorset. ‘Falling Man’ he called it. Head downward, hurtling it seems into infinity, this figure plunged eternally down the rock, suspended timelessly in a state of helplessness and terror. This seems to represent a counterpoint to the idea of a lonely figure poised in a graceful if melancholy stance with eyes on the horizon. ‘Falling Man’ was inscribed on an enduring rock, in a quarry, rather than swung up onto the manmade rooftops of a city. (It was noted that when the figures first appeared on the London rooftops, there was more than one concerned call about a suicide attempt). One could think also of Adam’s fall from grace, or Satan’s being expelled from Paradise. Both falls were the result of transgression against the law, a wish to overturn the rule of the Father. I will return to this theme in terms of Oedipal wishes later.

Gormley’s title ‘Event Horizon’ for the installation intrigued me. His catalogue notes to the ‘Blind Light’ exhibition explain that he uses the term to refer to ‘the body of the observable

universe'. The term 'Event Horizon' was one first used in theoretical physics, to describe the surface of a 'black hole', beyond which the inward pull of gravity is so overwhelming that no information about the black hole's interior can ever escape into the outer universe. Inside the black hole matter has collapsed to infinite density-and the question is, where lies the 'point of no return' at which any matter or energy is doomed to disappear from the visible universe? The event horizon is a kind of surface or 'skin', covering this bizarre and terrifying situation where space and time cease to exist. Gormley's stated project is that his 'silent witnesses' are designed to create uncertainty about the work's dimensions- 'Beyond the figures you can actually see, how many more are there that you can't see?' I would like to offer an additional view, and investigate whether there is anything to be gained by looking at unconscious processes.

Black holes, it is thought, may form as the result of a massive star collapsing at its 'death'. It was Frances Tustin, a brilliant and insightful child and adult psychotherapist, who first noted these phenomena in work with autistic patients, and linked them with catastrophic feelings of being separated and unprotected, indeed with no sense of a protective 'skin'. These ideas have links with Esther Bick's notion of the newborn infant : it was she who, at John Bowlby's suggestion, initiated seminars on Infant Observation at the Tavistock Clinic, as a pre-requisite for psychoanalytic training in work with children. The infant at the beginning feels, as she indicated (1968), to a large extent fragmented, experiencing mother's physical and psychological holding as a kind of mental skin holding his primitive self together. The psychoanalyst Bion (1959) elaborated the idea of the way this holding and 'containment', in which the caretaker receives the projections of the infant's terror and attempts to understand them, then returning them in a more digested form , allays fears of disintegration and falling apart. Houzel (1995) in a paper called 'Precipitation Anxiety' describes what may happen if the psychic as well as the physical gradient is not managed in a way which ameliorates the terror of 'falling into the world'-and it is significant that midwives in some cultures still talk of 'catching' the baby as she is born. Again, observers of infants may witness many such moments in the early weeks of an infant's life, in the course of an ordinary day, where change and fear of absence or of being uncontained, one might hypothesise, stir up the anxieties experienced around the profound moment of being born: that 'caesura of birth' as Freud had called it.

An adolescent post-autistic patient of mine was convinced (when he dared finally to tell me about it) that there was a black hole in the clinic car park. Later as the work continued he thought that it might be in the cupboard under the sink of the consulting room, and he would walk ‘casually’ past the cupboard doors, and then suddenly pounce and open them just to check that it wasn’t actually so-until the next time. For this young man a catastrophic birth experience had plunged him into just such an unprotected ‘black hole’ space, and it was one which needed careful working with over time, in order to free him at least to some extent from his worst fears of annihilation, of being lost in space-time and unable to anchor himself on some solid ground. He could begin to turn more towards life, with the treatment being hypothesised in some sense as a protective ‘skin’ of understanding over time, where before he had felt in his internal world only the absence of this provision.

A colleague of mine (Pecotic 2002) extended this argument further to think about, not the hole in the self, but the hole in the mind of the object, a mother preoccupied with depression, so that the maternal gaze, and the dark pupil of the maternal eye, might be construed as being malignantly active in sucking in the child’s psyche. While Tustin talked of ‘autistic capsules’ in the personality, Ogden (1997) then went on to talk about what he called ‘the autistic contiguous position’, a universal mode of generating experience, which he sees as part of the normal daily human repertoire functioning as a respite from bombardment: what he sees as being a buffer against the daily strains of being alive.

As Klein (1959: 248) averred ‘the process of birth and the adjustment to postnatal situations cause the baby to experience anxiety of a persecuting nature’. She went on to write, in her last paper, unpublished till after her death, that ‘phantasies never stop playing a great part in mental life’. Loneliness, she thought, could never be completely eliminated. And it was Winnicott (1963) who maintained that isolation is a necessary condition for psychological health-an essential component in the experience of living and reality testing. He saw the individual to be, in some fundamental and important sense, ‘an isolate, permanently unknown, in fact unfound’ (p.183). There are issues here which are beyond the scope of this essay on Gormley’s ‘Event Horizon’, but perhaps germane to it.

Linking these thoughts up with the Gormley installation, the question then arises: might the figures be looking into the black hole (some of them indeed looked down) or beyond it? Are they sentinels warning of danger, or might they delineate the borders between survival and an infinite fall into the void?

So we have in essence several themes here: that of transience as opposed to continuity, that of being 'above it all', looking towards an unknown future, and the opposite idea of 'falling', or being held to prevent the fall, in what might think of as a reciprocal holding gaze. Winnicott (1989, p.199) observed that 'successful' analyses 'enable patients to abandon invulnerability and become sufferers'. I wondered whether these contrasting ideas of suffering and denial of pain might be latent in the minds of those looking at these imposing figures on the skyline. When I visited the area (before I saw the actual exhibition inside the Hayward), I was struck by the impact of the figures, and the differential reactions to them, both in myself, and my companion, and I had also recently heard about the petition to keep them in place, a testimony clearly to that impact, whatever it might be about. Did they represent Superman, or Everyman, (and where does this leave Superwoman, or Everywoman?), safety or danger, might they be seen as parents, either benign or critical, or as fellow members of the naked human race? They look out, and we look at them-they do not watch us watching them, their purpose is to be seen by us, and yet they may also convey the effect of being onlookers, or over-lookers, as they stand on the various buildings around the Thames. From the earliest eye contact and exchange of gaze between the infant and the caretaker, looking and being looked at are vital components in the establishment of personal relationships. What cultural function might these statues be seen to perform at an unconscious level? Might they represent conflicts between differing aspects of our internal reality, and internal object relations?

In order to think more about this I decided to interview people, both adults and if possible children, as they were in situ on the South Bank, where they could see the statues grouped around the horizon, in the hope of at least finding out a little more about the issue. This of course can in no way be seen as a scientific research project in the usual sense, and I am aware that interviewing processes present one with a different set of methodological problems from the ones to which I am used as a child and adult psychotherapist. These are contingent on core

concepts such as transference, resistance, free association and play, involving the patient's deployment of defences to ward off painful ideas about separation, separateness, and loss, shown over time within a defined and regular space. I wondered however whether I might at least find some clues to my questions. 'Certainty' as Freud said in *Moses and Monotheism* 'Is unattainable'. (1939 p 27 fn): and my modest goal was to find out something more from a psychoanalytic vertex about the same question that Gormley himself posed—what do his audience make of his works? As he observed: 'You could say that there are two very discrete and almost oppositional places where a sculpture belongs. One is physical, in a landscape or a room, and the other is in the imagination of the viewer, in her/his experience and memory. They are equally important and in many sense the work is there waiting—almost like a trap—for the life of the viewer to come and fill it, or inhabit it. And then once 'captured' the art—or its arising—inhabits him or her...how an object is interpreted or experienced by the viewer is none of my business at all' (p.44). Bollas (2000) talked of cities as 'holding environments'. He describes what he calls 'the spirit of human endeavour' which needs representation in the built environment and goes on to say 'we may consider the ways in which a psychoanalysis of the built world could lead to a psycho-spiritual representation of human life' (p.28). It became evident during the following interviews that the 'built environment', often experienced by people in big cities as being impersonal and forbidding, may certainly benefit from the humanising presence of works of art created by sculptors such as Gormley, who respond to deep human needs and by so doing offer different facets for interpretation and enjoyment, giving people as it were an 'inner city' which is more manageable.

As I thought more about the vastness of city landscapes, and the need for touchstones within them, I was reminded of a boy patient of mine, who had great difficulty in sleeping. He told me that when he closed his eyes at night, he was lost in terrifying vastness as if he were plunged into infinite space; his bed became huge and unconfining. Then, when the feeling became insupportable, he would open his eyes, turn around, and touch the wall of his room. These themes will be elaborated during the course of the interviews, and the discussion which follows.

The interviews:

As this was my first entry into the field of interviewing, I had prepared in my mind a set of questions to act as starting points to the conversations (as I preferred to call them). This did not mean they would provide a rigid protocol to be followed, but that they would hopefully allow for a more flexible flow if this proved possible, but with an inherent containing structure. In practice, as conversations unfolded, not all the questions necessarily came up each time. Nevertheless what I hoped (and this was achieved in some cases I think) was that there might be a sort of ‘surprising the unconscious’ as people developed their thoughts- perhaps somewhat similar to Gormley’s idea of a ‘trap’ where the art and the individual mind come into a particular relationship. In fact several people thanked me for the conversation, saying that it had indeed allowed them to put words to what they had been experiencing, at least in a preliminary way.

I had ten questions as a framework for whatever might emerge:

1. What were your first thoughts when you saw the figures?
2. What do you think they might be doing?
3. How do they make you feel?
4. Would you like to be up there with them?
5. What might you say to one of them?
6. What might he say to you?
7. Do you think they are exhibitionist?
8. Does it bother you that there are no women?
9. There’s a petition to request that they stay-would you support that?
10. Would you miss them if they go?

The fifteen interviews as a whole were variously of mixed composition, with some family groups, some couples, some pairs or groups of friends, and a few individuals. Group conversations inevitably had their own particular dynamic, where one person’s response might provoke either agreement or the offering of a different point of view, towards an interesting and more complex picture. One Dutch father of a nine-year-old boy who spoke no English, at first translated my questions and the boy’s responses, and then became so interested that he started to elaborate his own views directly to me, without translation for his son. This then became a feature of the boy’s further responses, in terms of an altered dynamic. It was interesting at this

point , when I managed to include the boy again by asking him what he thought the figures might say to him, he said, tellingly I thought, ‘I would have nothing to say to them, and there are so many people here, why should the figures bother to speak to me?’ He became animated again when I asked what he thought of the figures staying on the buildings (his father had thought they should not stay). ‘I’d like that’, he said in a lively tone-‘then the whole town would be the museum, not just inside!’

I found the experience of being able to have conversations with people in quite a free-flowing way, nevertheless defined by the questions I had in mind, to be in itself an interesting and dynamic experience. As one might expect, the eye and mind of the beholder holds individual meaning, both internally and externally, and these meanings are complicated and many-faceted. Unconscious meanings may be less clear, but some of the ideas expressed in the conversations here may be suggestive. I will recount them here in the order in which I taped them, and then try to make some general conclusions based on what my various conversations brought up.

I made a hesitant beginning, and for the first conversation, with a family group, I forgot to switch on the recorder. Luckily my training enabled me to recall afterwards how the family had responded, for the most part positively, to my request. The adolescent daughter was enthusiastic, and likened the figures to ‘guardian angels’. Her mother was not sure, but she said they gave her a ‘funny, friendly feeling’, and then she wondered how they would feel up there in their own silent world. She felt they would not communicate with her. The father agreed, but said they gave him an added sense of perspective. At the end, their hitherto silent adolescent son said ‘I’m not sure I like them at all, I feel they’re up there watching me’- which seemed to have some links with being watched by a silent and perhaps judgmental set of father figures, a thought voiced by a boy at a sensitive adolescent phase.

Next I talked to a cheerful and very young French couple, who were enthusiastic, compared them to gargoyles on French churches ‘just looking down, checking and protecting’- ‘they’re funny, and nice- I would say hallo but they wouldn’t say anything, but that’s OK-I like this sort of artistic stuff, it would be good to keep them’. The young girl said that to her they seemed sexless rather than specifically male-then she said ‘but the ones far away could be women’, as if

that was something which she would like.

After that I interviewed a group of people who were clearly on a day trip to London. ‘We come from the Angel’ as one woman proudly said. ‘They’re just looking into the distance, no, they can’t be looking at me, but maybe they’re just observing us, like Dr Who (sic) or Angels in America’. One of the older men said they made him feel reassured, while another found it hard to enter into the idea of communication at all- ‘I’m not used to talking to inanimate objects-well I think they should stay, they’re good as lightning conductors at least’. A younger woman took up the idea of watching, but in a less benign way-she felt she wouldn’t want one too near, peering into her living room, a bit like a peeping Tom. There seemed to be some messages here about my own presence, and as I thanked them and turned away, the man previously quoted said ‘well Ken Livingstone might canvass them-or are you Mrs Gormley?’

At an adjacent table sat an elderly man, his physically disabled wife, and their middle-aged son. They were keen to talk. The woman said immediately ‘Anything that makes you look up and out is brilliant-I saw a child inside who had been quite disoriented in the cloud room, then bored-then I saw him changing when he went out and looked at the figures from the terraces, he was very excited and enjoying them-they make you look further than you normally would, they are for instance on the other side of the river too—they make me smile but I might find them threatening if I was in a glum mood or with weather like yesterday (monsoons!)-I hate heights, but I would say “Stay there for a long time, looking as far as you can see”-they might say “come up and join us” (which seemed like a hopeful aspiration, for this disabled older woman). Her son said ‘I like them a lot, they make you look out at buildings, it’s good to look up and not have your head always down- they make the lumps of concrete round here look better, you look away and over, they’re great fun & I’d like them to stay, I’d like them maybe to turn round and look in different directions too, change *their* perspective.’ His mother said ‘You can’t be sure they are looking at this space’, and her son rejoined ‘Maybe they’re saying there go another bunch of tourists, wonder what they’re saying about us! It works both ways-they add a lot. It’s the opposite of *Blind Light*, looking inwards, and at gallery walls, this is about looking *outward* at the whole environment- it gives an expanded view, it definitely changes your perspective.’ His father, hitherto rather silent, suddenly said spontaneously ‘Where are the women?-There should

be women, with equality and all-if there are 31 men we need 31 women'. His wife said quite swiftly that she didn't react to the absence of women, then turned to her son and asked him about coming to work every morning across Charing X bridge. He said 'It's great to look UP and not DOWN --I'll be looking out for them!' His father laughed, and said 'you'd look more if there were more women!'

Next I talked to a young Italian woman, sitting alone with a guidebook and a map. She too seemed keen to share her thoughts. 'They're strange, you feel there should be a group of people underneath saying "please don't jump"- they're on the edge: in a way it's quite comical-it's an unusual way to look down on us-it's strange to be looked down on like that, weird, I'd say "Don't jump!" too. I think Gormley is trying to make his presence felt-- "I'm here & I'm going to stay"-I think they should stay, everyone can see them taking over parts of London-I'm an art student on a summer course at the Slade, the way he works with space is fantastic, interacting with it, and he takes sculpture to a whole new level-London is such a big place you can easily feel faceless, get lost, (she had her map open on the table) and he has taken it over and made his presence felt.. "he's here"—we should look up to him, it's sort of arrogant but in a good way, lots of people are scared to make a statement, but he said I'm going to take over this space and see what people say. The Beach figures are different, in an organic place, this is more mechanical, man-made-I don't feel the absence of women in the piece-he's himself, that's quite important the way he uses himself, making a statement but making the art more personal-it's Gormley all over the place, he makes his presence felt so strongly & that's good.'

I then approached two laughing middle-aged women, who looked as though they were thoroughly enjoying their day out, welcoming me and making space at the table for me to sit down. After I explained what I was doing, they launched into their own conversation about the figures with no further prompting from me. 'There's a feeling of being watched, yes, but they're not intimidating-it's good for kids, great fun-the stance of the figures isn't threatening, they're standing with their arms open and sort of loose, you might see some people on rooves, security people, with guns, but these are gentle watching presences.' The second woman agreed-'That's such a good point, really thoughtful-I see them all the time because I live quite near here, it feels like fun, they're part of our environment now-it's strange living in London, such a

big place you think you would never see people you know but I do quite a lot, and now Gormley is one of them! My daughter feels that too and likes spotting them. It's great to have public art with a sense of fun as well as something more profound-you don't feel they're intruding in your space. I read before that they were all Gormley, so I maybe relate to them differently-you can get up close & personal to him on Waterloo Bridge'. (This is one of the four sculptures at ground level, who are all anatomically correct). The first woman said 'I couldn't go and join one of them, I might like to but I'm scare of heights'. Her friend took up the conversation again: 'Another friend and I, and we hadn't had a drink either, had quite a long conversation with him the other night on the bridge-some of the comments are too inappropriate to repeat! You couldn't do that on your own, chatting to him with that sense of fun. I thought afterwards how extraordinary, my friend is quite introverted and wouldn't normally do that sort of thing-he elicits a real response-he wouldn't say anything back, he's just there.. I like heights, and I think how brilliant it would be to stand up there, it reminds me of that play *Angels in America*, I saw it the other night, it's quite comforting to think "they're all around you"-it'll be brilliant if they stay-London can be quite scary (but not for me so much now as an older woman) but they can be reassuring.' Her friend said 'The Angel of the North is an icon now isn't it, I think people want them to stay because they humanise the city, a lot of buildings can seem too imposing, and that was a bit of a nasty era for architecture, all concrete and glass if I don't sound too much like Prince Charles—quite dominating and cold, and these figures are saying "we're on top of it". 'A male friend asked me if I felt left out because there were no women-in this era of complex political correctness it's hard to say really-but a woman collaborator would have changed it, I'm happy to let men-he's a person-he and I have more in common than not—Someone was talking about the Cerne Abbas giant on television -that the word "man" derives from "mind" not sexuality'. Her friend said ruefully 'I've sometimes been called "the chair" and I'd rather be called "man" than "chair"-this isn't the right place to do stuff about equality though I do know there is still a lot to do. Is he exhibitionist?' (JE talks here of the blog comment reported in the newspapers, about the statues being "just an excuse for him to exhibit his penis") 'Oh, that's enormously trivialising isn't it...but...if it was Tracey Emin what would I think? I might be guilty of thinking it is...maybe it's just my perception of her art.' Her friend said 'I'd be envious of her cleavage now I don't have one any more! I think Gormley represents every person, like in Field, he is focussed on our common humanity-and he is using the body he has to hand. He

comes across as someone you can relate to-talented & complicated but not exhibitionist... someone I aspire to be-anyway, could you really think of a man with no trousers as threatening?’

Nearby was a group of two young women and a young man, who said they were from an art appreciation group. They too embarked on the conversation enthusiastically. The first young woman said ‘They’re great, I feel like I’m looking at the ocean-when I was a child I lived by the beach and the harbour & I loved watching the boats coming in and then going again over the horizon, they make me think of something coming, it’s a good feeling, about my childhood-and Gormley’s also got pieces on a beach, too.’ Her female companion had a more sober view: ‘I’m interested in them a lot, and they make me think about being in London at Liverpool street post the 7/7 disaster-the marksmen were all around on the rooftops and I was in my office-these individual figures are watching & there’s a faint air of surveillance about them-but that’s when they’re high up, you don’t get that feeling when they’re on the ground like the one at the back of the gallery. Anyway, they do remind me that I’m in a city, which is a contrast to being by the sea.’ Their male companion agreed: ‘They’re really interesting, they make people stop and think and become aware of themselves too, which is what he was aiming for, I find them quite mesmerising, I can stop and then feel I’m trying to get a connection with them, there’s definitely the sense of being watched by them and also watching them. I can’t think of what I might say but I’d want to make some sort of connection-which is interesting when you think you’re in a city full of people wanting naturally to have a bit of private space around themselves (JE ‘and I’m aware I’m coming into yours’)-- it’s interesting, you see one lone person and maybe there’s a wish to make a connection with, whereas you wouldn’t normally want to do that, but why wouldn’t you want to have that connection with a person in the street-of course a person standing naked on top of a building would be different-that makes me think of jumpers, isolated & alone and yet not fragile, at least not these figures, but looking powerful.’ The second woman agreed again: ‘Yes, they’re close to the edge- a colleague saw the first one out of the office window and was quite concerned. I’d probably raise a hand and see if he raised his back! No, he’s not an exhibitionist, it’s just what Gormley’s always done-he’s an anonymous form really, makes you think about an alien a bit, someone apart, a god-figure, a symbol of someone watching us or us watching ourselves Yes, how we get a sense of identification and identity,

inside and outside ourselves'. I wondered with the women about the absence of female figures. 'Not really- you might think he's a bit egotistical, but he also stands for everyone-every person- he's not godlike really, but there's something important about the figures being up high. No, I don't want them to stay- it makes me think of the 4th plinth in Trafalgar Square- they have about a year each-I wouldn't want to see them as permanent-they all face the Hayward & are part of one show- they're site-specific-what would Gormley want anyway? He might feel it corrupted the work or something to have them there all the time separately from the exhibition.' Their male companion agreed: 'What would be the relevance? He's trying to express himself—like on the Beach-these lone anonymous figures staring out, we connect to this, perhaps that's what we all do, we're all looking for something.'

I then approached a lone woman, in her 30s, and she welcomed me. (I had been particularly concerned not to intrude on the space of lone individuals). 'I first saw one when I was going home from work on the train-I was at first surprised but then I remembered I'd read about them- or maybe I was on the bus, I don't remember—but it was a grey day and it was silhouetted against the sky, it looked very powerful-it makes you look but I'm not sure why-I don't feel observed by them, it's us doing the observing-they seem like a benign force, the whole point is that they're blank and then people can project on to them-what you see is what you're feeling- but anyway it was on my homeward commute I think, and I wasn't really in a very receptive mood—but I do remember that first view stayed in my mind as a powerful impression but it gets less when you see them more-I suppose they are men but they didn't strike me as gendered, just distant figures—you can relate to it, but they are really a blank canvas, and I'm not sure if some had breasts it would make a difference-although then it would be a different sort of project if some were women, then you'd have to think of ethnic diversity etc-that would start classifying them rather than people making what they want of them-they are above classification. I do like them and if Gormley was happy for them to stay I'd like that, they do add to the skyline and the rather brutal architecture, it's featureless—they humanise it for me... but you can get that high view anyway if you want to, just go up to the top of a tall building—thank you for talking to me, it's nice to be able to think about this.'

There was a group of adolescents nearby, looking as if they were on the move, but willing to stay for a few moments: there were three girls and a boy. The girls, as with the previous adolescent girl in the family group, were quite enthusiastic about them... ' I think they're interesting, I really like them looking over city, looking down on Thames, but no, they're not looking at us'. Their boy companion had a different view, again, somewhat similar to the previous adolescent boy I had talked to. ' Well I think they're weird, I don't really like them at all, in fact, standing on top of rooves --what are they doing? Maybe they're trying to suicide' (sic). First girl: 'I'd say, what are you doing up there? But they wouldn't answer, (rather disappointed) they're only statues'. Second girl: 'I like them, it's like carnival, makes me feel really happy, yes they should stay, they're fun.' The boy said: 'I don't really care, but maybe they should just take them down, it's funny to have men on top of rooves, I really wish they would take them down'.

By contrast, the next group of two women and a man were very voluble and articulate, and the man began the conversation., even before I had switched on the tape. Man: 'I think the statues should be on St Paul's and the Gherkin-they say something about the conflict of man and metropolis, and the city dominating human aspirations-these figures rise above the city, and so create some type of humanity, they are spiritually nourishing, yes, they should definitely be on the Gherkin & St Pauls' First woman: 'But then they'd be seen as a sort of joke on St Paul's and it might upset people-they'd be sticking two fingers up and they are not there for that-but I do dislike the Gherkin, it's arrogant, so that would be OK, I think, to stick two fingers up to arrogant architects-we don't want buildings that are a pastiche of what's gone before, but a lot of buildings now seems to be about the ego of the architect, look at me! No I don't think they're exhibitionist, he only casts his own body, it's about him.' Man: 'No I agree, sexism shouldn't come in to it, they are a celebration of the human form, they say something about a self, they are totally personal, he didn't want to talk about the sexes'. Second woman: 'I saw in the catalogue he has cast some female figures, but it isn't something that bothers me'. First woman: 'It's his art, not our art! There are a lot of ways in which feminism got it wrong-women are not the same as men but they are equal-it went too far-it's OK by me if that's what he wants to show'. Man: 'I think you're lifted up to their level, it's a celebration of the human spirit, they're not looking down on us, I can imagine myself up there but it would be bloody cold!' Second woman: 'But

you'd get such a wonderful view!' Man: 'I feel there's if you like an unspoken bond between them and me-it's a celebration, touching the transcendental without having to say anything, a bit like being understood without words.' Second woman: 'I stroked the ones in the gallery, I would probably do that up there, it's a friendly experience (perhaps a parental experience?—{JE}) I felt very close to the figures inside when I touched them. I'd touch them but not talk, they don't speak, they're 'completely apart'-there would be a kind of wordless communion' Her female friend agreed, but with rather strong reservations: 'Yes they are 'something apart'-but they don't come across to me as being tender or loving, they are very cold'. First woman: 'Not to me, I feel very close to them'. Man: 'I think they are very private people, I wouldn't intrude in on them unless they made the first moves' (JE apologises here for her intrusion!) First woman: 'They are strong and I'd like them to stay'. Man: 'They add a marvellous presence, and give a spiritual dimension which is totally lacking in the city at the moment which is about mammon and making money-we need to present another facet and they do that, they add to human experience, the human condition. Yes, I will miss them when they are taken away'. First woman: 'Also it's good watching people watching them, looking for them, it gives you a whole different dimension, they're fun for people, say with their grandchildren, and it's fun looking for them'.

Another man and a woman sitting nearby were also very interested to have a conversation about their experiences of the figures. The woman began: 'It certainly gives us something to look at-makes you feel different about distances, it's not just blocks then, there's more a feeling of being scaled, it's quite odd really-in a way a bit spooky thinking of men walking across roofs, a bit like the exhibition and the whiteout space, a sudden appearance like that is a sudden disappearance-it sort of makes you feel you have been put down to scale yourself, you are another little figure in a bigger landscape, makes me feel part of the landscape myself'. Her companion continued: 'It's so interesting, a human form on top of a building, turning it upside down in a way, the buildings usually dominate people, it raised issues about how you display sculpture and where do you put public art-on a plinth? In a gallery? or places that kind of surprise and shock-I know there was concern about suicide then they first went up, maybe people still think that-they are on top-I'm not up there with them'. The woman agreed: 'Yes, in my scale I am definitely down here'. The man went on: 'There's the repetition of the figures too,

they are not straightforwardly representing or doing anything, their features are smoothed off, they're anyone, Everyman in a way-what is the action they are engaged in? It is surveillance, are we being watched by these brooding figures which is how they can come across sometimes if you catch them at certain angles-they are far from standard although they are all the same-their location in different places gives different meanings.' His companion said 'I hadn't seen them as ominous, although having said that you could also say they are slightly spooky, but also playful, and unexpected, a great contrast to blocks of functional architecture-the architecture can have an overwhelming quality and they reduce that feeling, give you more a sense of fun-cocking a snook at architect's seriousness, the blockiness of it, figures on the tops of the building are disarming, you can have a sense like a child of leaping from roof to roof'. Man: 'They are unexpected, that's so good, it makes you pause, because there's a sort of disjunction, they make you look at the world slightly differently , gives a different sense of scale-the Angel of the North is so vast and then he's also done very small figures in Field, these are human size, not massive or tiny'. Woman: 'They really open up the space, we don't normally think of the tops of buildings and the sky above them, they make you look up at the sky...There are so many figures of women everywhere, why not see a naked man, that's fine'. Her companion suggested: 'I think it would have a different meaning because there are different associations to a woman's body-maybe people would say quite different things As a woman you'd probably feel vulnerable if you saw a naked woman up there, it might be a bit dodgy. They don't make me feel vulnerable as a man, but you couldn't get away from all the usual associations with women's bodies in art-it's quite good to see the male body in a position of vulnerability...it doesn't feel abusive in the same way as it might if it were a woman's body- it would feel abusive I think. It's tempting to say to them 'Jump!' – they look like the suspended figures inside who are falling'. The woman disagreed: 'Oh no, I'd say carry on looking up! I don't think they can see us, for me they are in their own space, in a different plane'. The man looked very thoughtful, then said slowly: 'There's something interesting about their posture, reminds me of diving when I was a child, you have your hands straight down and then you lift up on your toes (*he stands up with some energy and does it*)-I think that posture of theirs is almost like that, something to do with high diving-there is that same element of waiting, stillness and concentration.'. The woman agreed: 'Yes they should stay longer but not for ever, because you don't want to lose that element of surprise but maybe then have something else surprising-I love that it comes out of nowhere, it

surprises something in all of us'. The man suggested: 'They could be moved around-you could have a year say not having them, then they could appear in different places. They've got a meaning much beyond most public sculpture'. The woman ended: 'It's that thing about London, it's so great to have these amazing things happen , how lovely for our city to have these surprising things!'

Finally I talked to a young woman with two children, while the children were taken off along the embankment by their grandfather. 'They seem like such still figures in this big city landscape to me', she said. 'I think of them observing time & movement, not threatening-a bit like the tide going in and out-you stop for a second to go where they are in your mind, you hold and let everything else continue round you, be at peace and at one with them, in unmeasured time-not physically but spiritually up there, because they are at one with the concrete environment, being made of industrial materials, they're part of the nature of the city in a way, there are particles that cling to them all, like barnacles, -they wouldn't say anything, they just are; you could go alongside them and then embrace that space and time, be as un-intrusive as possible, a bit like the cloud cube, become part of it without interrupting them, join them and then come away again, a sort of fluid connection-you might have a conversation with them emotionally, and see what they see, the people, the buildings, the environment, what's behind you what's in front of you... the girls said why are there only men? They find it a bit bizarre, but if there were women too it would perhaps be different, more about sex and sexuality? The artist is a guy, it's his work, they're made of industrial, heavy materials-a woman would be more likely to do something more fluid, softer, echoing her body shape-shadows-these are male, phallic structures-there is industrial concrete all around & because he has used these sort of materials the figures sort of join the furniture-might a female piece in softer materials make it more exhibitionist? I don't know. Should they stay there? Well that statue of Alison Lapper in Trafalgar Square has been removed now, these things are good to kind of knock you, but then they should just roll away, not to be there as monuments-part of what comes and goes-they kind of work while they're there, for 10 days or 10 years, but they shouldn't be stuck in stone, it's good to see them and I guess I might miss them when they're gone because they are very different-but I've seen Gormley's work before in different places-maybe we might have something else up there? I think of them as sort of spiritual mentors-they're not looking at us but

up at the sky, and we look up at them and get something from that.'

Discussion

'We're all looking for something', averred one of the young men I interviewed. As I hope the spread of conversations above indicate in different ways, this search while diverse, seems also to group around different ideas related, as I suggest, to unconscious processes: wishes, desires and anxieties. The statues, one might hypothesise, inhabit for the beholder what Winnicott (1971) called 'the transitional space'. This was originally conceived of as developing a space between mother and infant during the process of separation and individuation, where the 'transitional object' appears, what he called 'the first non-me object', to aid in the onward journey with the issues to do with separation, loss and mourning (as well too as issues of gain, when the infant turns towards the wider world). This space evolves with maturity into the space where adult play, and creativity, may grow and elaborate into cultural and aesthetic experience: 'I have used the term cultural experience as an extension of the idea of transitional phenomena and of play without being certain that I can define the word "culture". The accent indeed is on experience. In using the word culture I am thinking of the inherited tradition. I am thinking of something that is in the common pool of humanity, into which individuals and groups of people may contribute, and from which we may all draw *if we have somewhere to put what we may find...* cultural experience begins with creative living first manifested in play' (p 116). So in other words, the child is indeed, to quote Wordsworth, in this sense father to the man.

While some of those I spoke to saw the figures as benign, benevolent superego figures of an almost advisory kind ('spiritual mentors'), for others, specifically the two adolescent boys, they had a more threatening mien. One could think of ways in which their very developmental stage had awakened for these adolescent boys earlier imagos of a father who protects mother from the infant's desires, and who could be seen in a castrating and potentially threatening way, as a reversal or projection of the boys' own impulses and wishes (see Freud and Klein for an elaboration of thinking around the Oedipus Complex, its stage of development for working through, and the timing of its inception in the mind of the infant or young child) . It was

interestingly also a young boy who suggested that the figures might be suicidal-though newspaper reports revealed that this had been a response made by several people, and these were not likely to have been all adolescent. It was notable that only one (woman) interviewee felt that the figures were remote and cold: perhaps in identification with critical superegos such as Klein described (Klein, E and G :255)

In terms of the male/female issue, predominantly one could suggest that the male statues were seen as wise (except in the cases of the adolescent boys, who saw them as threatening) paternal figures. The notion of female figures gave rise to thoughts of women in their sexual rather than maternal role, (and the related issue of feminism) although one woman talked of the statues inside the gallery she had stroked ‘in wordless communication’ which could be seen to be connected to infantile memories of a preverbal communion with mother; what one might term an intimate maternal space. The last interviewee, when she talked of qualities of hardness and softness, seemed perhaps also in touch with this aspect. This was also alluded to, but more tangentially, by those who talked of architecture being ‘humanised’ by the appearance of the figures: as it were benign parental figures who help the child make sense of the world.

In other ways too there seemed to be a thread of thinking very much in touch with the experience of being a child: running, diving, watching the boats come in to the harbour, and as a grandparent showing grandchildren something of the world around which is exciting and full of potential; a sense of celebration of life and potency, aspiration rather than omnipotence. The joy and re-realisation with which the man described his diving child self seemed a clear link with the theme of potential and exploration. Bachelard (58 *o.p cit*) quotes the travel writer Dirole: ‘in deep water the diver loses the ordinary ties of time and space and makes life resemble an obscure, inner poem’ (p.206). It made me recall in retrospect a patient of mine, a rather depressed boy who defended against feelings by acting out, which behaviour had caused him to be excluded from two schools. When he made (for the first time, successfully) a paper aeroplane, instead of interpreting that he wanted to fly away from his worries, I suggested that he also had a sincere wish to fly in a freer way, to feel less ground down by a history of failure. He looked at me intently and asked ‘did it take you a long time to train for your job?’ which I took to be his appreciation of the way I could acknowledge both his previous despair and the

potential emergence of some hope. Both flying and diving in these contexts refer to hope rather than despair.

The issue of the statues remaining in their places or being taken away provoked different responses, which seemed in some cases to be connected to the idea that they represented ‘spiritual mentors’ offering a needed containing potential, the desire of the individual to be held in mind: parental figures holding children (or the infantile aspects of the self) by their gaze—which was described by one man as ‘mesmerising’. Other people interviewed, while clearly having a sense of their powerful presences, seemed more willing to accept the idea of their being taken away, but perhaps replaced later with something different. Referring back to Freud’s conversation with his ‘two young friends’, the notion of being small and transient in relation to a larger and perhaps unfeeling universe seemed to hover around the edges of some conversations. Of course these short interviews could only touch on some of these aspects rather than explore them in depth. However the thanks I received from many of my interviewees led me to hope that more thoughts might be generated later.

At the end of her life Melanie Klein wrote a paper ‘On the Sense of Loneliness’, published posthumously (1963, *op.cit.*). She talked about the perpetual human wish for ‘an understanding without words’. One of my interviewees previously quoted had expressed the same thought. Klein went on to say: ‘Full and permanent integration is never possible, for some polarity between the life and death instincts always persists and remains the deepest source of conflict... The longing to understand oneself is bound up with the need to be understood by the internalised good object’ (p. 302). It seemed evident to me in the course of these interviews that the real and often deep responses to Gormley’s statues over the city is a mark of this longing, present in us all, at an unconscious level: a longing ‘surprised’ by works of art, or ‘the trap’ which Gormley himself referred to, which give us, to re-quote Winnicott, ‘somewhere to put what we may find’

Conclusion

In September 2007, the Guardian published a letter from a reader wondering if others also felt bereft at the absence of the Event Horizon figures, after they had been taken down. She talked

about there being something ‘magnificent and comforting;’ about their presence, and ended ‘they certainly fulfilled a very important function: they persuaded complete strangers to strike up conversations about art’. Perhaps, or so I like to think, she was one of the people who were generous enough to talk to me about the figures and what they might mean to the individual. What was hugely interesting to me in these conversations was the way in which there were revealed so many layers of meaning, some of which I have touched on here, but rereading the interviews seem to indicate to me more lines of discovery that I might have pursued, in terms of social and cultural studies, given a different perspective from that offered by my own professional training and interests.

Sculpture in the 21st century is now very rarely commemorative of ‘great figures’, and is beginning to be increasingly recognised as being able to give some sort of identity to public spaces, what might be called a human dimension. The vast and impersonal spaces created by London’s city architecture around the South Bank were for a short while given a human dimension by Gormley’s figures, and his title ‘Event Horizon’ resonates with this idea of ourselves as individuals perched on the edge of a vast space, internal as well as external, where different solutions may be posed and meanings sought.

When President John F Kennedy opened the Robert Frost Library in Amherst, Massachusetts in 1963, he sent out a resounding challenge and rationale for the presence of art in our world. ‘The artist, however faithful to his personal vision of reality, becomes the last champion of the individual mind and sensibility against an intrusive society and an officious state... I see little of more importance to the future of society and civilisation than full recognition of the place of the artist. If art is to nourish the roots of our culture, society must set the artist free to follow his vision wherever it takes him.’

One wonders where Gormley’s vision will next take him. I submit that these short interviews do indeed attest to his being able to tap into truths about our nature, and that the meaning of his work lies in a very real sense in the eye of the beholder, with his or her internal preoccupations about flying and falling, seeing and being seen, in the ongoing and fundamental dialectic of the container and the contained.

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