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ABSTRACT et BIBLIOGRAPHIE

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**Antony Gormley:
Revolutions about the body**

"I'm trying to deal with what it feels to be a human being." Antony Gormley in conversation with Paul Kopecek, 1994. (from <http://www.antonygormley.com/resources/interview-item/id/127>)

Antony Gormley was born in 1950 in London. He made his first works in the 1970s and he was first exhibited at the Whitechapel Gallery in 1981. He was notably awarded the Turner Prize in 1994. Antony Gormley has always worked from the human body, being his own body or that of others and his statues have always been quite figurative which – in a way - seems to drive him away from revolution. Revolution describes a radical change but also refers to the act of revolving, which is to say, turning around an axis. Therefore revolution paradoxically implies both rupture and continuity.

My aim is to study revolution in relation to Gormley's treatment of the body. To what extent is the traditional representation of the body in western history upset by Gormley's works?

1- **"Still Standing": facing classical marbles**

A case in point: the exhibition in the Galleries of the Hermitage Museum (2011)

2 things happened:

- Classical marbles were removed from their plinths where they usually stood

"Gormley has created an exhibition of classical sculpture the like of which has never been seen within the walls of the Hermitage" (98)

- 17 specially made statues from AG were exhibited in the galleries of the palace. Contemporary statues whose cubic bodies could be reminiscent of pixels were clashing with the surrounding décor.

Viewers could correlate the proportions of their own bodies with that of the marbles. They could revolve around statues freely too.

Gods normally above men stood at men's level hence the question of "transgression". Rules seem to have been breached by moving ancient statues from their plinths.

If the change between the marbles and Gormley's work is obvious yet some common points might be found in the proportions and the horizontality of the bodies. One has to know that Gormley is quite tall (1m90) and strong. Ironically his body might recall that the proportions of Greek statues.

Gormley creates a **dialogue** between past and contemporary art so that the viewer becomes conscious of the passage of time and can reflect on his/her own position in time and history.

2- Gender deconstruction: to foster a new revolution?

The body is traditionally associated to a sexual identity often claimed in works of art. Yet Gormley is not interested in statues' sexual identities.

- Sexual attributes are endowed by nature while gender is considered to be the result of culture. Different feminists have argued it. Gormley's *Matter* seems to be reminiscent of this claim
- Sexual attributes seem to be interchangeable: a particular body does not own them. The body seems to be – originally – asexual: *The Insiders*
- The question of maternity is ambiguously tackled with the 2 following works: *Bearing I, Bearing II*

He rather focuses on *being* and this is why the human body seems to be universal as both men and women have the same body composed of an envelope and of interiority.

I want to convey how Buddhism – primarily the practice of meditation but also the artefact associated to the thought field of Buddhism – has influenced me. It was Buddhism rather than the Western canon, which gave me the idea of the abstract body. (Antony Gormley, *On Sculpture*, p. 143)

Abstract used in the art field refer to departure from reality. On the contrary, Gormley's works are quite figurative. Yet that does not prevent them from reflecting on the body as an abstract entity, which could be the mind, the soul, the energy and so on. The abstract body can paradoxically be tackled in sculpture that is a material artistic medium.

3- a metaphysical experience

- The process of moulding the body: Gormley casts his own body in order to express the metaphysical essence of the human body: the air is present inside the empty mould as mentioned in the list of materials and he resorts to meditation to help him hold postures
- Some of Gormley huge statues look like Buddha as stated by some critics: *Room* (2014 – London), *Block II* (2017).

AG: “We have to change our cultural heroes from generals and captains of industry to meditators and mediators, from Rambo and Terminator to Ghandi and the Dalai Lama.” (Antony Gormley, *Art in the Time of Global Warming*, 2010.)

He wants to revolutionise our way of relating to and perceiving our bodies so that we could live in better harmony with the world around us.

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