

A Study of Anthony Gormley's Contemporary Artistic Practice of Human Sculpture and Public Space

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Abstract

Antony Gormley, as an internationally renowned contemporary artist, has been committed to the artistic practice of human sculpture. He brings the human sculpture back to the center of contemporary art in a new way. The most distinctive external feature of his artistic practice is his approach to different public spaces, which is based on the updated understanding of space in contemporary art. Since the 20th century, "space" has gradually become the focus of attention in the field of Western humanities and social sciences, highlighting its independent value and deriving unprecedented dimensions and semantics. This article first examines the artist's historical background and growth experiences, analyzes Gormley's typical works, and discusses the factors such as materials, actions, and concepts in his works. On this basis, it explores Gormley's artistic practice of human sculpture in a wide range of public spaces, and ultimately uncovering the artistic contributions of Gormley's body sculptures to the renewal of relationships among the body, space, environment, and the public in contemporary times.

1. Introduction

1.1 Research background and significance

Antony Gormley, born in London in 1950, is a world-renowned contemporary British artist. Antony Gormley's most famous works are self-cast lead human sculptures, leading to a series of artistic practices centered on human sculptures, and achieved success and prestige. Antony Gormley revitalized marginalized human sculpture in contemporary art through a distinctive practice focused on various public spaces, based on the renewal of spatial understanding in contemporary art practice. [1, 2] Since the 20th century, "space" has gradually become the focus of attention in the field of Western humanities and social sciences, increasingly highlighting its independent value and deriving unprecedented dimensions and semantics. Since the 20th century, "space" has gradually become the focus of attention in the Western humanities and social sciences, highlighting its independent value and giving rise to unprecedented dimensions and semantics. At the same time, the "corporeal turn" and the "spatial turn" have also become highly regarded research fields. Under the research and discussion from an interdisciplinary perspective, the

discourses of "body", "environment", and "site" in the art domain are continuously being updated, directly influencing contemporary artistic practices [3, 4].

Therefore, this research will study the artistic practice of Antony Gormley's human sculpture in public space, to explore the unique artistic practice methods and concepts of Gormley, and to explore Gormley's unique contribution to the relationship between body and space in the field of contemporary artistic practice. By constructing a case study perspective and method that matches the cutting-edge and experimental contemporary artists like Antony Gormley, we can explore the significance and value of the renewal of body and space concepts in contemporary art, and how these new concepts affect our understanding of human role in the world, and how to develop new cognition of self, society and environment in contemporary art practice and theory, so as to provide useful reference for contemporary art creation.

1.2 Domestic and international research status and trends

The discourse discussion of body and space involves a wide range, and the achievements in the fields of philosophy, sociology and art history have inspired this study. This paper mainly involves the social and cultural research dimensions of Western body-space-material research, modern and contemporary art theory since the 20th century.

First, the relevant achievements of theoretical research around "body" are the important theoretical basis of this paper. Philosophy of the body is a major turning point in the development of Western philosophy and has become a philosophical paradigm with universal significance [3]. Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Foucault, Heidegger, Maurice Merleau-Ponty expounded their opinions on the body and its meaning [5]. From the 1980s to the present, the theoretical exploration of the "body" has been expanding, such as aesthetics of the body, sociology of the body, phenomenology of the body and so on, all of which have contributed to the research in the field of humanities and social sciences. In China, a large number of articles have been written to study and discuss the corporeal turn. Li Mu summarizes the process of the corporeal turn in Western philosophy and the relationship between the "corporeal turn" and the "spatial turn"[6]. Li Xinhui summarizes the theory and history of the body in Western visual art from the 20th century to the present, and explores the unique appearance and form of the body in contemporary art practice [5].

Secondly, the research of this paper needs to be based on the history and present situation of modern and contemporary public space, as well as the related art theory and practice. With the changes in the social realities of contemporary political and economic conditions and the in-depth interdisciplinary research on space, the status of public space is continuously rising and its scope is expanding. The discussion of public space now nearly encompasses all social and natural spaces of human activity. At the same time, in 1960s and 1970s, the site-specific art practice of anti-concept and anti-business criticized the power system of traditional art business, and emphasized the uniqueness and inimitable artistic and social value of the work in each site. Since then, "site" has become an important category to discuss artistic practice. Miwon Kwon [7] discusses the concept of site in the practice of public space art from the 20th century to the present, and how to expand it from the concept that focuses on describing the space-time elements of a specific environment to a loose concept of "public sphere" that describes a wider range of social, historical, natural, human and other categories [7, 8]. Cai Guojie [9] and Chen Tian [10] have also further studied this topic from different angles. At the same time, considering the influence of minimalist art and land art on Antony Gormley, Michael Fried's *Art and Objecthood* [11], as the most important text in minimalist art criticism, also provides a key

reference for this study, and provides an important reference for further exploring the interaction between people, objects and space and modern and contemporary art [12].

Since the 20th century, both "corporeal turn" and "spatial turn" in the field of humanities and social sciences have changed from the "New World" to a remarkable research field. With the participation of many interdisciplinary subjects, many new ideas about redefining human beings and world have been extended from their combination [3]. By analyzing the current state of art theory research, it is evident that China is less responsive to the evolving concepts of body and space in contemporary art compared to foreign academia. Much of the case study on artists like Antony Gormley remains rooted in earlier philosophical or aesthetic perspectives, leading to significant gaps in relating this research to the artist's works and conceptual expressions. This highlights both the challenges and the value of this study.

The study of Antony Gormley inevitably involves the case analysis of the artist's practice. In China, most periodical articles on Antony Gormley discuss his sculpture language, formal style or spiritual connotation, such as Liu Shuhong's *Sculpture View and Form Language of Antony Gormley* [13] and Wu Dingyu's *The Confrontation of Body and Space—Sculpture Art of Antony Gormley* [14], but these articles have not formed a system. Sun Chuan mainly expounds the return consciousness of Gormley's works [15]. Li Mengyang explores the boundaries of exhibition space, outdoor public space and mental space in Antony Gormley's artistic practice [16]. Zhang Yujie analyzes Gormley's works from the perspective of public art [17]. In the Chinese dissertation, Lian Wenli's *A Study of Antony Gormley* provides a more detailed overview of Gormley's life and creative experience, and explores Gormley's artistic characteristics [18]. Zhao Shuyan's *The Truth of Art — From the Works of Anselm Kiefer and Antony Gormley* compares the life experiences and works of Anselm Kiefer and Antony Gormley in order to explore their artistic motivation and spirit [19].

The works and exhibitions, videos and interviews in Antony Gormley's personal website are all important reference sources for this article. The contents of foreign publications about Antony Gormley are mostly the corresponding introduction texts of an exhibition, while those in China are mainly the translations of some corresponding publications. Among them, the more important publications are *Antony Gormley on Sculpture* [1] and *The Story of Sculpture* [2]. *Antony Gormley on Sculpture* includes some important artistic practices and related introductions of Gormley before 2014, and talks about his artistic ideas. In *The Story of Sculpture*, Gormley and Martin Gayford reviewed the history of sculpture through dialogue, and in the process, Gormley talked about his own sculpture concept and other influences on him.

2. Body and Space in Art

Since the 20th century, the "body", which was originally suppressed and took a secondary position in Western thought, has attracted the attention of a wide range of scholars of humanities and social sciences, and has then become one of the most important terms in the Western academic world since the twentieth century. Since Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche (1844-1900), many first-class Western thinkers such as Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) and Michel Foucault (1844-1900), 1926-1984), Gilles Deleuze, 1925-1995) and Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961) [20] all contributed wisdom to this topic. Reflections on the body involve multiple disciplines such as philosophy, aesthetics, psychology, and sociology, and are related to themes like "space" [3]. Since the 20th century, based on the great progress made in scientific theory, the study of

space theory in the Western humanities and social sciences has been unprecedentedly high [21]. With the changes of ideas and social reality, people's definitions of art, artists and places where art takes place were questioned, overturned, rewritten and reconstructed with unprecedented strength in this period [10]. This paper focuses on a review of the body and space in postwar Western art from the 1950s to 1970s.

2.1 Body in Western Art in the 20th Century

As one of the most traditional and important motifs in the history of Western art, "body" has been constantly redefined and redrawn with the great changes in modern human society in the 20th century, and the way in which "body" exists and participates in artistic practice has also been constantly innovated with the change of artistic concepts.

The new theory, new form and new media extended by the renewal of body concept have promoted the change of artistic expression and participation in modern and contemporary art, which has formed a huge impact on the artistic practice. Li Xinhui described that artists since the 20th century have adopted an attitude of reevaluating all values and surpassing good and evil, similar to Nietzsche's. They are active, bold, and unscrupulous, expressing their opinions in an overall atmosphere of rebellion. During the same period, various art forms and different schools from the past often evolved alongside one another, influencing each other while engaging in both conflict and integration[5]. Among them, the revolutionary body art is undoubtedly one of the most important veins in the history of Western modern art in the 20th century.

As an important boundary to define human identity, the human body image in works of art can undoubtedly be regarded as the artist's internal reflection on human identity and the world. In line with the social background and cultural trend of thought, alienated bodies frequently appear in visual art works since the 20th century. Alberto Giacometti's (1901-1966) extraordinary artistic career can be traced back to the enthusiastic changes of European art after the Second World War [22]. As a post-war existentialist, he pioneered the creation of a style that summarized philosophical reflections on existence, alienation, and anxiety. He is undoubtedly best remembered for his distinctive sculptures of the human body, which are universally regarded as symbols of the pain of the times and post-war trauma.

In painting, the pure body has become a new modern motif, which has continued to this day and has been widely concerned by artists. Francis Bacon (1909-1992), as one of the most important artists in the 20th century, created a highly symbolic distorted and traumatic body image after the war. In Bacon's works, the body pulls, tears, twists and bends in space, and the faces of the characters are dislocated and entangled in an incredible way. The violence that Bacon excavated from his body gave the viewer a great shock. Bacon's portraits are full of modern atmosphere. These characters know at a glance that they are modern people in the city, not typical images shaped by realistic methods, but pure flesh as if they had no identity.[23] Bacon's human body image has a wide influence, such as the inspiration for Deleuze's theoretical research.

In addition to sculpture and painting, the Performance art, which arose in 1950s and 1960s, is undoubtedly a liberation of the largest scale of the body in Western art. The artist's attraction to the surrounding world is directly reflected in his body. "Happenings" and "Fluxus" gradually formed a far-reaching gravitational field. Performance art, body art and conceptual art all converge on this trend, where the body is developed as a medium, thus opening new forms of aesthetics [5]. In the performance of performance art and the "event", the body, as a relational existence in the situation, is a cultural and symbolic one, which makes the body a place for

various forces to play games. It involves complex relationships such as presence and absence, public and privacy, virtuality and reality. The body is always in complex relationships and becomes a place for various forces to play games, just as Foucault is committed to revealing the intervention of power in the body.

Carolee Schneemann (1939-2019) was a pioneering American artist known for using her body as a medium since the 1960s. As the first body artist in the U.S. and a trailblazer in performance and feminist art, she challenged traditional aesthetics in works like *Eye Body*, where she covered her naked body with paint and grease, transforming the perception of women from objects of the gaze to active subjects.[5] Throughout her career, Carolee Schneemann explored female sensuality and liberation from societal norms. In her 1975 performance *Interior Scroll*, she climbed onto a table wearing a list and apron, then removed them to pull a long piece of cloth from her body, reading its words while smoking, illustrating a "site of power play". The body serves as a fundamental carrier of human experience, housing consciousness and emotions while connecting individuals to the world. As artistic practices evolved, the body became linked to various external spaces, expanding its role as an internal space.

2.2 The concept of space in Western modern and contemporary art

In the 1960s, more and more artists began to leave art institutions such as museums and galleries to practice in a wider space. This change in practice is based on the renewal of the understanding of space in contemporary art practice. Since the 20th century, "space" has gradually become the focus of attention in the field of Western art and social sciences, which has increasingly highlighted its independent value and derived unprecedented dimensions and semantics. Words such as "theater", "environment" and "site" are constantly updated, which directly affects the practice of art. Therefore, the innovation of space concept in modern and contemporary art since the 20th century is also multifaceted.

On the one hand, there is a close internal relationship between "corporeal turn" and "spatial turn". The linguistic turn of Western philosophy has brought about the corporeal turn [6], and from the perspective of the body, the turn in spatial research was brought about by the shift from mind-body dualism to mind-body monism. In particular, the body theory of the postmodern philosopher Deleuze and theory of the production of space of the French thinker Henri Lefebvre (1901-1991) have given a broader "space" to the concept and understanding of space [24]. These changes in space are all related to the change of body in the history of Western thought. It can even be said that it is the change of body that brings about the change of space cognition.[6]

The connection between corporeal movement and spatial concepts is evident in mid-20th century artistic practices. In 1968, Richard Schechner published the 6 *Axioms of Environment Theatre*, introducing a new form of "environmental theater" where the text is no longer the sole focus, allowing all elements, especially space, to express themselves. Theater events can take place in "found space" or "transformed spaces", with flexible and changing focal points [25]. *Dionysus in 1969*, directed by Schechner and his troupe, serves as a prime example of this approach and represents a significant milestone in the avant-garde theater of the 1960s [10].

On the other hand, since the late 1960s, with the rise of post-modernism art forms such as performance art, concept art and land art within the art world, the "site-specific"[7] of art has become one of the focuses of the art world. The term "site-specific" does not refer to a specific artistic language or creative medium, but a method to deal with the relationship between art and a specific environment.

In the minimalism in the late 1960s and early 1970s, works in specific fields appeared for the first time, which challenged the paradigm of modernist art production and display. As a minimalist sculpture and literalist, Michael Fried called minimalist artists "literalists" in *"Art and Objecthood: essays and reviews"* [26]. This group includes Frank Stella, Jules Olitski, Robert Morris, Donald Judd and Tony Smith. Donald Judd (1928-1994), one of the representative figures, aims to make independent objects without implying anything beyond its own physical existence, to get rid of the dependence of abstract expressionist works on the painter's self-reference. For example, the abandonment of the pedestal by minimalist sculpture can be regarded as a challenge to the modernist paradigm. Modernist sculpture consciously separates itself from the surrounding environment by setting up a pedestal, expressing indifference to the environment, thus enhancing self-reference.[7] Therefore, unlike the traditional sculpture which is placed on a pedestal, Judd's unadorned works stand directly on the floor, forcing the audience to face their own and material existence.

Minimalist sculptor Carl Andre (1935-) describes his works as "sculpture as place". Andre defines "place" as an area in the environment, which has changed, making the whole environment more conspicuous. Place emphasizes the close relationship between artistic works and the spatial environment in which they are displayed and spread. Minimalist artists began to demand that works should be created for specific places, and the relationship between works and environment is unique and unrepeatable.[27]

In 1968, Richard Serra (1938-2024) created his early representative work *Splash* in a minimalist exhibition in Manhattan. Serra is randomly splashing molten lead blocks, and gradually cooling the solidified lead blocks and combining them with the walls and floors. The significance of *Splash* is that it subverts the exhibition and collection methods of museum space, and the works cannot be displayed, stored, transported and traded at will. The belief that "to remove the work is to destroy the work" reached its peak in *Tilted Arc*. [8]

The relationship between works and places is specific, unique and immovable, and this "site-specific" represents a direction of avant-garde art in that period. A famous American art critic and curator, Douglas Crimp (1944-2019), conducted a detailed analysis in the second part of his book *"On the Museum's Ruins"*[28]. He explored the relationships between minimalism, public art, and museum art, the spatial power of public art, and the relationship between artists and the public. Sun Zhenhua quoted Douglas Klump in the *Concept and Method of Public Art*, it should be the "site-specific" is not Serra's personal invention, but the embodiment of the avant-garde of contemporary art. This avant-garde nature lies in the critique of modernist and especially abstract expressionist modes of art, as opposed to the stereotypical, institutionalized, commercialized, and even "Master" classical or modernist art of the ideal white cube institution. Some artists like Serra sensitively captured the revolutionary change of contemporary art "going out of the museum". In this era when popular culture is surging, it is an inevitable choice for contemporary art to move into public space.[8]

After contemporary art began to move into public space, the site-specificity of art projects became the key element and universal feature in public art creation. Artists conceive and execute their works as an inseparable part of their surroundings. In this process, the complex participation of the audience has become a necessary link in the establishment of their works. Serra's interest in the work itself, the space created by the work and the audience's visual relationship can be seen in Serra's *Torqued Ellipse* (Source: <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/80742>), which invites the audience to experience their environment by walking in the work and through physical and

visual perception. The space where art takes place is no longer a blank sheet of paper or an idealized field occupied by an artist, but a real, vivid and even ordinary public space.

As opposed to the public spaces of the city, artist Robert Smithson (1938-1973; Biography: <https://holtsmithsonfoundation.org/biography-robert-smithson>) created his most famous work, *Spiral Jetty* (Source: <https://holtsmithsonfoundation.org/spiral-jetty>). Robert Smithson not only created the word "Land Art", but also gave birth to the land art movement itself. Most of Smithson's works are designed to be consumed by time and nature, so their life span is limited. Before that, most artists hoped to achieve immortality in different senses by creating long-lasting works. This movement inspired a new generation of artists to go out of the studio, representing the unique integration of installation, conceptual art, performance art, space environment and public participation. So far, it can be said that the concept of space in modern and contemporary art has been completely changed.

In reviewing this historical period, the exploration of avant-garde art forms like minimalist art, conceptual art, performance art, public art, and land art led to the emergence of a new concept of space. This concept challenges the idealization of traditional space and the assumptions of viewing subjects in epistemology. The challenge manifests in two key ways: it subverts traditional participation modes and roles of body, matter, and environment by drawing from physics and physiology, and it critiques the standardization of modern galleries, which often serve ideological and market functions. This critique diminishes the absolute subjectivity of modernist artists and shifts meaning from the artistic object to the spatial environment. Consequently, both "body" and "space" experience significant liberation, requiring an inseparable relationship that transforms "Art Work" into dynamic "Art Practice". This new connection between body and space is also evolving in contemporary art.

3. New Connection between Body and Space

This paper will further study the methods and concepts of Antony Gormley's artistic practice under the above background. Combined with Antony Gormley's life and practice, this paper explores the elements of Antony Gormley's human sculpture practice, including how he began to pay attention to human body and space, how to choose the way to carry out practice, and how new changes are expressed in his works.

3.1 Antony Gormley's Early Artistic Practice

Antony Gormley comes from a wealthy family, growing up as the youngest of seven children in a strict Catholic household, he often felt pressure and isolation, leading to a sense of escape when he left for studies. In 1968, Gormley enrolled at Trinity College, Cambridge, where he studied archaeology, anthropology, and art history — fields that influenced his later work. Cambridge during the late 1960s was a tumultuous time, prompting him to reevaluate his beliefs and experience a crisis of faith. After graduating, lacking a clear career path, he fled from his family and traveled to India, where he engaged with Buddhist teachers and learned meditation with monks.

From birth to graduation from Cambridge University and then traveling to India, Antony Gormley experienced a great change in his outlook on life, and this change had a crucial impact on the artist's future works. Antony Gormley has been trying to combine consciousness with body in his artistic activities, so that the spirit and body will no longer conflict. He focused on the

relationship between body and space, inside and outside, and self and the universe. His early trip to Asia influenced his life's thinking and artistic creation on these issues. For example, his earliest work *Sleeping Place* (Figure 1) came directly from what he saw and thought in India. It can be said that *Sleeping Place* (1974) sowed the seeds for everything that followed.



Figure 1: *Sleeping Place*, 1974, plaster and linen, 55 × 91 × 106 cm. Source: <https://www.antonygormley.com/works/sculpture/series/first-plaster-works>

After returning to England, Gormley received art training at Central Saint Martins, Goldsmiths, and Slade School of Fine Art. He created his first concrete sculptures, "*Sleeping Place*", inspired by homeless individuals he observed sleeping under blankets in India. He recalled, "Made immediately on my return from India, I laid plaster-soaked sheets over the bodies of friends to make simple hollow shells, generating forms that are both abstract and yet specific". This work reflects his sensitivity as a sculptor and his exploration of the body as a fundamental space in his art.

In the 1970s, Antony Gormley experimented with materials like lead, stone, wood, and glass. He focused on simple forms and techniques to emphasize the material itself and critique concepts, reflecting minimalist features. Gormley stated, "I abandoned any thought of inscribing ideas into material", seeking to reveal themes inherent in the materials. His works often involved peeling logs to expose growth beneath the bark. For instance, "*Flat Tree*" (1978) features a spirally arranged sliced trunk in Figure 2, while "*Re-arranged Tree*" (1978) displays a 30-year-old pine tree cut into 30 piles, ranging from one to thirty pieces.



Figure 2 : *Flat Tree*, 1978, larch wood, diameter: 6.78 m. Photograph by Stephen White, London. Source: <https://www.antonygormley.com/works/sculpture/series/early-tree-works>



Figure 3: *Re-arranged Tree*, 1978, elm, 760 × 73 × 13 cm. Source: <https://www.antonygormley.com/works/sculpture/series/early-tree-works>

Gormley uses glass in a way that describes its transparency and fragility. Both *Glass Mountain* (1978; Figure 4) and *Glass Pool* (1978; Figure 5) try to make a whole from parts. In *The Glass Mountain*, he cut glass pieces in the same shape from small to large and stacked them into a glass pyramid about 60 cm high. The *Glass Pool*, on the other hand, smashed 6 mm thick glass shards on the floor and re-cut them in concentric rings. All the early works of stone, wood and glass tried to find structure and content in the material itself. Gormley aims to allow materials to express their inherent qualities, similar to his use of wood in his early tree works.

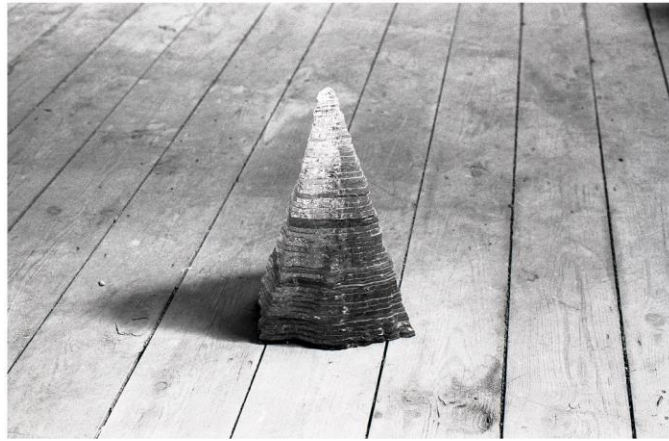


Figure 4: *Glass Mountain*, 1978, glass, 60 × 38 × 38 cm. Source: <https://www.antonygormley.com/works/sculpture/series/early-glass-works>

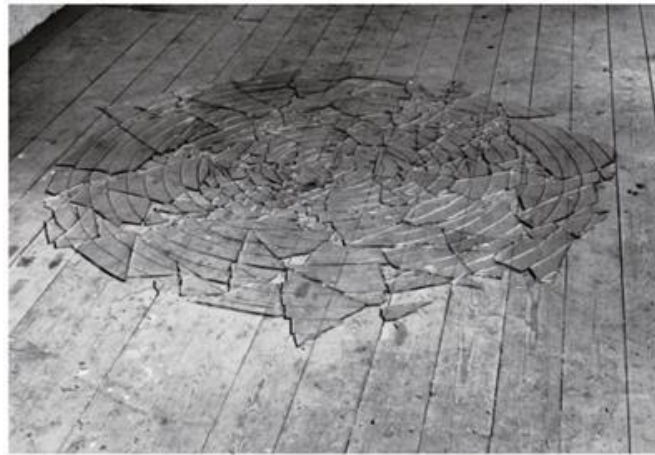


Figure 5: *Glass Pool*, 1978, glass, 8 × 1820 mm diameter. Source: <https://www.antonygormley.com/works/sculpture/series/early-glass-works>

This has some similarities with the "literalist shape" pointed out by Fred in *Art and Physical Properties*. In Fred's view, realists highlight the materiality of realism by emphasizing the main position of the base shape and the subordinate position of the painted shape. The shape in the plane is developed around the existence of the base shape, so the work is emphasized as object. The audience does not enter the image drawn, shaped or presented by painting and sculpture, but is opposite to a material entity, which forces the audience to generate a scene containing both according to their own perspective, that is, what Fred called "theatricality".[11]

The influence of the concept and method of minimalism on Antony Gormley is clearly visible in these works, but beyond that, Antony Gormley shows a unique spatial understanding of inward exploration, or, more accurately, an exploration of the relationship between internal and external space. In these early works, Gormley tends to interrogate the material itself through disintegration, layering and reorganization, or to reveal the intrinsic essence of a material or the course of a material's life time, as he puts it: "The tree within the tree, the seed within the wood" (Figure 6).



Figure 6: *Tree Seed*, 1978, beech wood, length: 39 cm, diameter: 33 cm. Source: <https://www.antonygormley.com/works/sculpture/series/early-tree-works>

In Gormley's early material attempts, the practice of bread is particularly worthy of attention, in which he links matter, space and physical activities more closely. *Bread Line* (1979; Figure 7) is a successful initial attempt. Before Gormley began to use his teeth to make *Bread Line*, he continued his previous concern about decomposition and reorganization, and made a mosaic of bread called *Disk* (1979; Figure 8). *Bread Line* is a ground work that uses teeth to bite off the bread and put it in a straight line. Gormley chose a common object close to life to present it in the way that people experience it every day, so he chose the most common white bread in Britain, "Mother's Pride". Bread and stable human life complement each other. *Bread Line* is regarded by artists as a record or scale to measure life, distance and time. In this series of explorations, Antony Gormley directly applied the body to creation for the first time, and the behavior of the body became a part of the establishment of the work.



Figure 7: *Bread Line*, 1979, bread, 1 × 1500 × 3 cm. Photograph by Stephen White, London. Source: <https://www.antonygormley.com/works/sculpture/series/bread-works>



Figure 8: *Disk*, 1979, bread, diameter: 330 mm × 8 mm high. Source: <https://www.antonygormley.com/works/sculpture/series/bread-works>

Gormley's bread practice reached a peak in *Bed* (Figure 9), which has become one of Gormley's early masterpieces. At the beginning of *Bed*, Gormley lies on the floor, and his wife draws the outline of his body. According to this outline, he created a mirror image space similar to his body, but split in two. Then he carried out a diet plan that lasted for three and a half months. In a pile of bread equivalent to a king-size double bed, he ate his own body space information, which was also the nutrition needed by his body. In these works, the artist emphasizes the close connection between daily material and human body. Gormley believes: "Sculpture has traditionally been about imposing mind over matter by an act of intelligence and will. I was looking for a more natural process, and eating is the primal process by which matter is transformed into mind."



Figure 9: *Bed*, 1980, bread and wax, 28 × 220 × 168 cm. Tate Collection, London, England. Source: <https://www.antonygormley.com/works/sculpture/series/bread-works>

After a series of attempts, the artist seems to find some connection between *The Bed* and the original *Sleeping Place*, a kind of sensitivity to inner and outer appearance, essence and appearance, body and space that belongs to Antony Gormley. This feature exists more clearly in his lead products from beginning to end.

In 1977, Antony Gormley made his first batch of lead products. He explained, "I started working with lead because it was a material that could be easily moulded and constructed in the studio, by beating and soldering." The good operability of lead also satisfies Gormley's interest in the relationship between visible and invisible, appearance and concealment. "All the first lead work involved covering and uncovering, insulating and revealing found objects; either closed forms like stones or open forms like bowls and shields." This interest has been well reflected in early lead products, such as *Land Sea and Air I* (1977-79; Figure 10) and *Three Bodies* (1981; Figure 11).



Figure 10: *Land Sea and Air I*, 1977-79, lead, stone, water and air, three elements each approx. 20 × 31

× 20 cm. Photograph by Stephen White, London. Source:

<https://www.antonygormley.com/works/sculpture/series/three-part-object-works>

Land Sea and Air I envelops the granite of Ireland's west coast in lead, creating a "lead shell" that can be full of water, empty, or contain the original stone. These three representations encapsulate nature's core elements while removing specific sensory perceptions of vision, touch, and sound. The audience must evoke a sense of matter through imagination based on the title. Gormley views the "lead shell" as a medium to facilitate the transition from material to imagination, treating the body as a ready-made object to inject imagination directly into the material, akin to painting.



Figure 11: *Three Bodies*, 1981, lead, fibreglass and earth, rock: 96 × 60 × 54 cm, pumpkin: 18 × 193 × 60 cm, shark: 18 × 193 × 60 cm. Source: <https://www.antonygormley.com/works/sculpture/series/three-part-object-works>

Gormley talked about Duchamp's influence on this series of works in *The Story of Sculpture*. In his early years, Gormley created a series of lead sculptures, inspired by Duchamp's pioneering concept of placing objects in new environments [2]. In *Three Bodies*, Gormley extracts three unrelated elements from the animal, plant, and mineral kingdoms, molding and casting them in lead. He replaces these objects with mud, ultimately returning the shark to the sea, the pumpkin to the earth, and the stone to the quarry. This process creates a harmony between emptiness and reality, linking form with matter through imagination and substance.

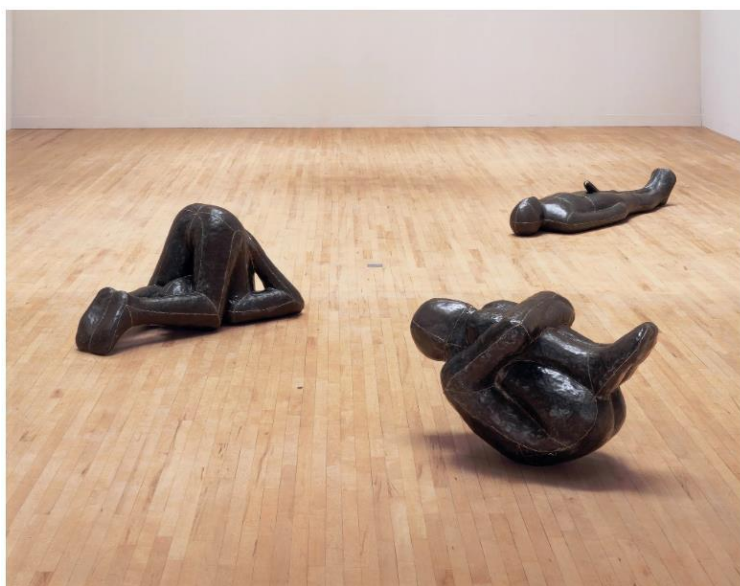


Figure 12: *Three Ways: Mould Hole and Passage*, 1981, lead, fibreglass and plaster, Mould: 60 × 98 ×

50 cm, Hole: 62 × 123 × 80 cm, Passage: 34 × 209 × 50 cm. Tate Collection, London, England.

Installation view, Tate Gallery, London, 2000. Photograph courtesy of Tate. Source:
<https://www.antonygormley.com/works/sculpture/series/three-part-lead-bodycase-works>

The work *Three Ways: Mould Hole and Passage* (1981) in Figure 12, can be regarded as a representative work of this period, which is the first combination of human body and lead in Gormley's works. The title of the work highlights three portals through which the artist suggests the male body interacts with the external world: the mouth, anus, and penis. These pieces explicitly confront the body's darker aspects, representing the space individuals inhabit when their eyes are closed. The audience can perceive this inner darkness through the openings.

After the progress of bread series and lead shell works, Gormley finally found the most important form of his artistic career and became more and more clear on the artistic theme. Body means a deep space inside the body. For the shell, it is the container of various organs and living tissues, and for the spirit, it is the abyss of self-awareness and imagination. But at the same time, in my opinion, this is also a "return" to *Sleeping Place*, which just confirms what Gormley said, "Everything that happened afterward sowed the seeds." After that, he began to make a series of cast lead human sculptures with himself as a model, and used this as a new starting point to explore the relationship between the body and the space where people live.

Looking back at this period, we can see how Gormley's concern about human body and space surfaced. On the one hand, it originated from personal direct experience, thinking and experience in youth, on the other hand, it was influenced by the artistic trend at that time. Together, they shaped Gormley's artistic interest.

3.2 The Body and Behavior of Antony Gormley's Human Sculpture

After a series of absorption, attempts and integration from 1970s to 1980s, Antony Gormley finally decided the direction of his artistic practice and established its basic features. This section will further turn to investigate the artist's subjective creation and internal motivation, and try to explain the internal reasons why artists choose their practice methods.

First, Gormley's childhood experience has become one of the important sources of inspiration for his artistic creation. When he was a child, he was often asked by his mother to take a nap in the attic upstairs. It was small, dark and sultry, and Gormley could only force himself to close his eyes. Gormley slowly felt the boundless and imaginative space in the darkness. He felt that the dark and narrow space began to expand and the temperature gradually dropped. He began to indulge in this body space and became interested in it. Gormley experienced a transition from claustrophobia to special freedom in this environment. (Source: <https://www.theculturium.com/antony-gormley-sculpted-space-within-and-without/>)

Gormley recalled his feelings in *Home* (1984; Figure 13). He made a house the size of a doll's house with brick soil, and covered the head of the human sculpture with a solid and narrow space. In *Out of This World* (1983-84; Figure 14), a clay figurine sits on a single head, where a lead shell made according to the real body is juxtaposed with an abstract body. *Home* reviews the claustrophobic memories of childhood, while *Out of This World* shows a dreamy space, which together point to an artist's concern about the problem of "mind-body division". From this, we can see that the inner space of the body that Gormley pays attention to is both physiological and psychological. In any case, there is a clear correlation between the childhood experience described by this artist and his personal experience of forty years of artistic practice.



Figure 13: *Home*, 1984, lead, terracotta, fibreglass, plaster and air, 65 × 220 × 110 cm. Collection of Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig Wien, Vienna, Austria. Source: <https://www.antonygormley.com/works/sculpture/series/terracotta-and-lead-works>



Figure 14: *Out of This World*, 1983-84, lead, terracotta, fibreglass and plaster, 140 × 85 × 140 cm. Source: <https://www.antonygormley.com/works/sculpture/series/terracotta-and-lead-works>

Regarding the use of one's own body, Gormley said that this human sculpture is not intended to make something similar to a self-portrait. Whether it is an empty or filled "shell" or a feeling of expansion or oppression, these works show a relationship, that is, the struggle and coordination between human inner space and outer space.

From the mid-1980s to the end of 1990s, Gormley continuously produced life-size human sculptures. On the one hand, to express his personal feelings, Gormley broke the established physical dimension of the body and began to try to extend it in space. *Filed* (1984; Figure 15) and *Tree* (1984-86) are attempts to express extension: *Field* is a desire to extend experience to the horizon, while *Tree* is a need to transcend it. Soon after, his "Double Bodycase Works" was intended to discuss the tension between thought and action, sex and death. (Source: <https://www.antonygormley.com/works/sculpture/series/double-bodycase-works-in-lead-and-cast-iron>)



Figure 15: *Field*, 1984, lead, fibreglass, plaster and air, 195 × 560 × 66 cm. Source: <https://www.antonygormley.com/works/sculpture/series/extended-works>

On the other hand, since 1984, Gormley has been interested in how to use works as "levers" to undermine the position certainty of the audience in space. His first hanging work, *Edge* (Source: <https://www.antonygormley.com/works/sculpture/series/suspended-and-gravity-works>), was hung on the wall at the height of the bed, and then he tried to hang it on the ceiling. These experiments reached a climax in *Drawn* (2000; Figure 16). From this stage on, Gormley has been able to make good use of the space inside and outside his body in his exploration. After that, Gormley further explored and expanded some existing trends in his works, making his thinking and expression of body and space richer and more mature.



Figure 16: *Drawn*, 2000, cast iron, 8 elements, each 154 × 133 × 187 cm. Installation view White Cube, London. Photograph by Stephen White, London. Source: <https://www.antonygormley.com/works/sculpture/series/suspended-and-gravity-works/drawn-2000>

3.3 Deformation of Antony Gormley's Human Sculpture

Since the end of the 20th century, Antony Gormley has devoted himself to making all kinds of deformed human sculptures. These human body deformations all come from Gormley's further exploration of body and space. From this period on, the works are often in large-scale series. And these series are often continued around the artist's thinking concept or feeling about body space. This section will analyze the specific reasons and ideological changes behind these "deformation" series.

One of the most exaggerated series of all, in terms of appearance, is undoubtedly the *Expansion Works*. From the outside, this series of works has nothing to do with the human body. They are just some swollen "iron balls" or "fruits", such as *Fruit*, *Body* and *Earth*. But in fact, this series began with the artist's interest in renegotiating the skin as epidermis and the space inside and outside epidermis. "I discovered that it was possible to extend the plaster mould of my own bodyform by applying a consistent measure using wooden spars radiating from nodal points at the extremities of the body." By connecting the outer ends of these wooden pillars, they form a continuous surface where the feet, hands, hips, and head become the focal points of multiple dome-like shapes that coalesce together. (Figure 18). Finally, the work is made of iron, such as the work named *Still Running* (1990-93; Figure 17).

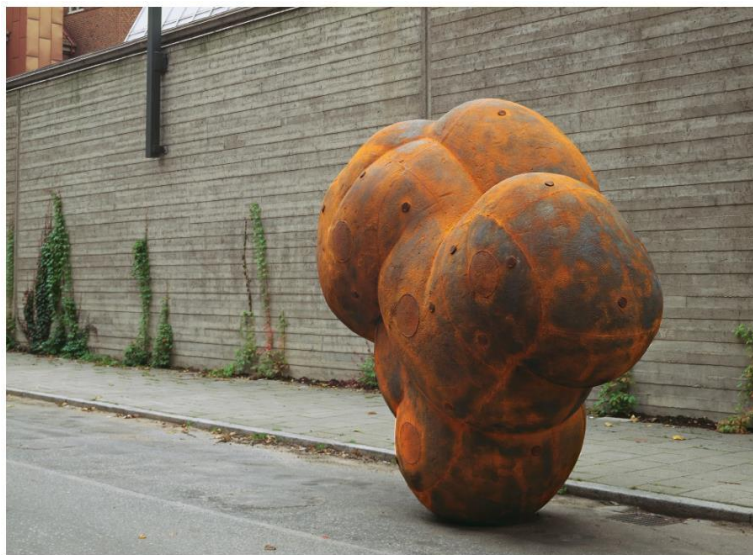


Figure 17: *Still Running*, 1990-93, cast iron and air, 317 × 276 × 148 cm. Collection of Umedalen Sculpture Foundation, Umea, Sweden. Source:

<https://www.antonygormley.com/works/sculpture/series/expansion-works>

The concept of "expansion" continued to develop in the subsequent *Cast Expansion Works* (Source: <https://www.antonygormley.com/works/sculpture/series/cast-expansion-works>) and *Tankers* (Source: <https://www.antonygormley.com/works/sculpture/series/tankers>). These two series continue the idea of expanding the body space, in which the molds are continuously expanded until they become simpler bodies. The treatment of adding skin to objects was first used in *Land Sea and Air I*. Any object will become spherical or egg-shaped after multiple layers of skin are applied.

The works of *Tankers* are intended to apply the concept of "Hubble constant" (the expansion rate of the universe) to the body space, and regard the body as a collection of cells or pixels. Each cell

is expanded, thus devouring the adjacent cells, and the accumulation of the whole cell eventually progresses to a single cube state. These cast iron "boxes" combine the ability of the body to accommodate consciousness with the ability of the building to close the body, and reconcile the open and closed, infinite and limited (Figure 18). They changed from solid bodies in the *Expansion Works* to hollow bodies: the life-size cubic space was expanded to a larger volume through this expansion, the works echoed the expansion of time and space in the cosmic scale. At the same time, Gormley tried to find expressive gestures and used them as the prototypes of these "boxes" to provide tension between concrete and abstract, void and matter for sculpture.



Figure 18: *Expanded Family × 5: Prop*, 2014, 4 mm corten steel, 5 sculptures; variable dimensions. Photograph by Jürgen Brinkmann. Source: <https://www.antonygormley.com/works/sculpture/series/tankers>

The organization of body space into a kind of cube or architectural space began with *Blockworks*. The early *Blockworks* works tried to build a body by welding 25×25×50 mm steel blocks (Figure 19). These works stand only by piled steel blocks. In this series of works, Gormley began to explore the materialization of body space from the early "body as an empty shell" to "body as a whole". If the previous hollow "lead shell" works regard the body as a shell wrapped in emptiness, then the *Blockworks* will turn emptiness into a solid state. These steel blocks can be regarded as arousing the inside of the body or breaking through the epidermis. While dissolving the boundaries of the body, they seem to be collapsing inward and expanding outward. The artist has established a tension between condensation and expansion, and a dynamic infiltration of space and mass into the whole body.



Figure 19: Concentrate I, 2003, mild steel blocks, 12.5 × 12.5 × 25 mm, 25 × 25 × 50 mm, 50 × 50 × 100 mm, 100 × 100 × 200 mm, 75 × 51 × 64 cm. Photograph by Stephen White, London. Source: <https://www.antonygormley.com/works/sculpture/series/blockworks>

Extended Blockworks extends the discussion to the physical space and architectural space. The steel block seems to be stretched by physical force, and the trunk or limbs extend out greatly, achieving a certain structure (Figure 20). Gormley thinks that if architectural space in the drawings becomes a possible body space through the extension of its delineation, rather than being a container or box for the body, so the body becomes a delineator of architectural space through the extensions in the sculptures.



Figure 20: Bunch, 2010, grey iron, 183 × 242 × 48.8 cm. Photograph by Stephen White, London. Source: <https://www.antonygormley.com/works/sculpture/series/extended-blockworks>

This attempt at architectural structure can also be seen in *Stations* (Figure 21). Here, Gormley built the human form with high-rise building model, and replaced anatomy with architectural grammar. These works have become a tool through which the viewer can feel the scale and weight, density and space of the body.



Figure 21: Station XVII, 2014, 10 mm Mild Steel Plate and 10 mm Square Section Mild Steel Bar, 195 × 49.5 × 35.8 cm. Photograph by Stephen White, London. Source: <https://www.antonygormley.com/works/sculpture/series/station>

As opposed to *Expansion*, *Insiders* are experiments to reduce and concentrate the body. The *Insiders* originally originated from the necessary reduction of the body when making *Angel of The North* (Figure 22). In order to make the 20 radial skeletons exist in the whole half inside and half outside to help support, the whole surface had to be reduced inward.



*Figure 22: Angel of The North, Gateshead, 1998. Work in Progress, 1998. Photograph by Keith Pattison.
Source: <https://www.antonygormley.com/works/making/angel-of-the-north>*

Inspired by this, in the *Insiders*, all limbs are taken out separately, and their cross sections are reduced, which is the opposite process of expanding the body (Figure 23). In Gormley's view, this inner is a kind of residue, which is more like a core than a skeleton, or a way to reveal things inside the body, such as consciousness and emotion. "I see these reduced forms as antennae for a particular kind of resilience that exists within all of us, that allows us to bear suffering but is itself created through painful experience."



*Figure 23: Insider V, 1998, cast iron, 194.5 × 51 × 28 cm. Photograph by Reiner Lautwein, Bochum.
Source: <https://www.antonygormley.com/works/sculpture/series/insiders>*

This theme is also expressed in the *Under My Skin works* (Source: <https://www.antonygormley.com/works/sculpture/series/under-my-skin>), which differ in that Gormley incorporates a fragmented "crystalline" structure (Figure 24). The first work was to reduce a relatively relaxed body shape by 12.5 mm. The surface of the work was replaced by a large number of 12.5 mm long nails driven into the surface. In *Net Polyhedra Works* (Source: <https://www.antonygormley.com/works/sculpture/series/net-polyhedra-works>), Gormley replaced the anatomical human body with closely nested polygonal units with sharp edges. This sculpture language comes from some natural structures, such as basalt or quartz, or a pile of bubbles. All these substances are in solid, liquid and gas. The human body composed of these forms is an accurate and random aggregation, and the *Net Polyhedra Works* is also one of the representatives of the openness of Gormley's works.



Figure 24: *Bridge (Net)*, 2017, 1.5 mm square section stainless steel bar, 188 × 46 × 35 cm. Photograph by Stephen White, London. Source: <https://www.antonygormley.com/works/sculpture/series/net-polyhedra-works>

While exploring "expansion" and "immanence", Gormley has been carrying out experiments on "openness" in practice. The earliest series in this direction is *Cage Works* (Source: <https://www.antonygormley.com/works/sculpture/series/cage-works>), which can be said to be an open translation of expansion series (Figure 25).



Figure 25: Sieve, 1997, 1996, 4 mm Square Steel Grid, Silver Solder, 207.5 × 67 × 39.5 cm. Installation Centro Galego de arte Contemporanea, Santiago de Compostela, Spain, 2002. Photograph by Mark Ritchie, Santiago de Compostela. Source: <https://www.antonygormley.com/works/sculpture/series/cage-works>

Open Expansion Works in Gormley's view: "The works are so open in structure as to be, for all intents and purposes, drawings in space". The work reveals a body space in its core (Figure 30). They are neither architecture nor anatomy, but more like random matrices found in fractal geometry. Here, Gormley hopes to reveal the space where the body is, not to express the body itself. In these immaterial works, the body is lost in space freely and weightlessly." They appear as emergent zones: you cannot be sure whether the bubble matrix is produced by the body zone, or the zone by the matrix". The structure of *Aperture works* is further opened (Figure 31), and the outer edge of the work seems to catch the air, suggesting the possibility of the body as an open space, or deducing a moment when the body is open to the surrounding space.

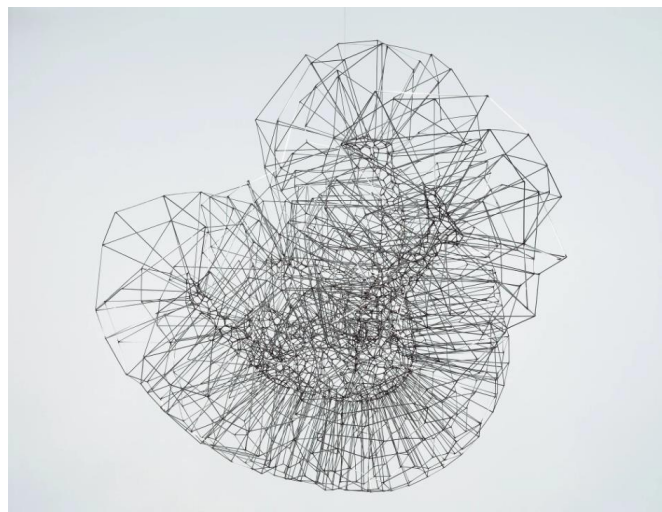


Figure 26: Energy I, 2007, 3 mm square section stainless steel bar, 230 × 210 × 210 cm. Photograph by

Stephen White, London. Source:
<https://www.antonygormley.com/works/sculpture/series/open-expansion-works>



Figure 27: Aperture, 2009, 6 mm square section mild steel bar, 188 × 51 × 34 cm. Photograph by Stephen White, London. Source: <https://www.antonygormley.com/works/sculpture/series/aperture>

In the continuous thinking and practice, Antony Gormley paid attention to and constructed a series of relations, such as expansion and inner, disintegration and structure, opening and closing, surface and inner, which became the supporting contents of Gormley's space view. Through these key dimensions, Gormley unites man and the world in a new understanding of space, making them together part of a whole in a broader perspective, constructing a new paradigm for understanding and grasping man and the world, body and space, spirit and matter.

4. Antony Gormley's Public Space Practice

The environmental choice of Antony Gormley's artistic practice is one of the core elements of his artistic establishment and success. On the one hand, it is based on Gormley's view on traditional art space. In his view, it is necessary to reflect on traditional space such as art museum. On the other hand, the inner thinking direction of Gormley's art requires Gormley to develop his artistic practice in various public spaces. Based on this, this paper analyzes the practice of Gormley's indoor and outdoor public spaces respectively.

4.1 Practice of Indoor Public Space

Antony Gormley's thoughts on the practice of public space art is various. First, Gormley's artistic exploration around "space" began at school, and the influence of minimalist sculpture and land art

in this period has been running through his practice, and finally developed into his independent space aesthetics. *Drawn* (Figure 16) makes the space of the architectural world felt in an unusual way of confrontation. These cast lead bodies had a fierce and absurd dialogue with their buildings, which fully stimulated the confrontation and tension between the body's ability to express freedom through extension and the compulsion of buildings. *Drawn* and *Lost Horizon* (2008; Figure 32) can be said to be the aesthetic masterpieces of activating space in Gormley's practice.



Figure 28: *Lost Horizon*, 2008, cast iron, 189 × 53 × 29 cm (32 elements). Photograph by Stephen White, London. Source: <https://www.antonygormley.com/works/exhibitions/firmament>

This unique presentation effect and exhibition experience is based on Gormley's conceptual thinking on architectural space. Gormley has always been obsessed with exploring the relationship between the body and architectural space. He regards the body as a "place" to coordinate the inner space and outer space of his body, not just an object. In Gormley's view, although we live in an artificial environment and are the only animals that build their habitats according to various principles, when we close our eyes and realize the darkness of our bodies, we are in an infinite and dimensionless space. Gormley associated this intimate experience with the body and architecture as a refuge for the mind. *Expansion Field* (2014; Figure 29) consists of 60 sculptures made of weather-resistant steel. The shapes of the sculptures come directly from the different postures of the human body and expand into an embodied space with blurred boundaries and dimensions. The box-like shape *Tankers* is intended to reconcile the infinite and the limited through the "container", and to link the ability of the body to accommodate the mind with the ability of the building to close the body. The expansion and large-scale arrangement of the body have changed the scale sense of the inner space and the outer space. The strict conceptual basis, volume and spatial arrangement of the work make the audience get a unique time and space experience at the first time.



Figure 29: Expansion Field, Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern, Switzerland, 2014. Expansion Field, 2014, 4 mm Corten steel, 60 elements; variable dimensions. Photograph by Dominique Uldry. Source: <https://www.antonygormley.com/works/exhibitions/expansion-field>

A keen perception of each specific spatial attribute is the key for Gormley to turn a limited and fixed artistic work into a unique artistic project and the grasping hand for controlling each unique space. Many of Gormley's practical projects are vivid cases of grasping indoor public space with site-specificity. *Still Standing* (2011; Figure 30) marks the first contact between living artists and classical galleries in the Winter Palace. Gormley placed nine classical statues in the collection directly on the ground. In another connected room, 17 solid "building blocks" of Gormley's human body are strictly arranged. Each sculpture is constructed from a series of small rectangular iron blocks intended to map the body's inherent bulk, mass, and construction with an architectural form of standing. Their distinctly modernist character contrasts with the ornate neoclassical architectural setting and idealized forms.



Figure 30: Still Standing, State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, Russia, 2011–12. Installation view.

Photograph by Yuri Molodkovets. Source:

<https://www.antonygormley.com/works/exhibitions/still-standing-russia>

In Gormley's view, museums are places to collect power items. In this environment, it is often difficult for the audience to connect their own life experiences with their works, and it is difficult to release the potential energy that has any physical and mental contact with art. Therefore, in *Still Standing* (Figure 31), Gormley introduced a false floor to help the audience overcome the height of the sculpture base and put the audience and the sculpture figures on the same plane. Gormley lowered the idealized "God" to the ground and made the public and "God" stand on the same position.



Figure 31: Still Standing, State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, Russia, 2011–12. Installation view.

Photograph by Yuri Molodkovets. Source:

<https://www.antonygormley.com/works/exhibitions/still-standing-russia>

Gormley provides a unique opportunity for the audience to re-experience the background and content of the museum space through *Still Standing*. Gormley stated that "eros and his left index finger" should not be protected by ropes or labels, as this creates a barrier to our intimate, fragile responses. He believes sculpture should serve as a catalyst for firsthand experience. He hopes both classical and contemporary works can encourage emergent behaviors, emphasizing the need to reform the restrictive behaviors imposed by plinths. He expressed delight that people are lying on the floor next to the blockworks, physically engaging with them to understand their forms. By dramatically liberating the relationship between the audience and the sculpture in the gallery space, Gormley made what the audience saw depend more on their own participation than on the theory and assumption of the museum, and connected two groups of sculptures with different meanings with the viewer's body in a more intimate way, pointing to a "standing" posture of the body together. Gormley's understanding of space has played an important role in the practice of public space, which can be said to be one of the foundations for the establishment of the whole exhibition project.

Domain Field (2003; Figure 32) is a vivid example of how Gormley completed different practical projects with the same works by virtue of his artistic ideas. The *Domain Field* was originally commissioned by the BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art in the UK, and consists of 287 sculptures. Volunteers ranging from 2 years old to 85 years old were molded into plaster molds by the working team, and then stainless-steel rods were welded together in each mold to build a single sculpture. In 2009, The *Domain Field* was displayed in an artificial "white box" in the Garage Centre For Contemporary Culture in Moscow (Figure 33). This specially constructed "white box" and the only narrow entrance in the industrial workshop-style space separate the inside and outside of the space. The pure space, the sculpture occupying the space and the natural skylight above bring the audience into a pure and extraordinary field. Gormley says, "The bodies in *Domain Field* are abstract but nevertheless relate to a real person in time. They are antennae, evoking an attitude while calling for some empathic projection from the viewer as he or she passes through the field. The sculptures call for what they lack: movement, thought, feeling, life. They call upon our conscience, our feeling, our movement, and we become part of the work."



Figure 32: *Domain Field*, Garage Centre for Contemporary Culture, Moscow, Russia, 2009. *Domain Field*, 2003, 4.76 mm square section stainless steel bar, various sizes: 287 elements, derived from moulds of local inhabitants of Newcastle-Gateshead aged 2.5-84 years. Photograph by Roman. Source: <https://www.antonygormley.com/works/exhibitions/domain-field>



Figure 33: *Domain Field*, Garage Centre for Contemporary Culture, Moscow, Russia, 2009. *Domain Field*, 2003, 4.76 mm square section stainless steel bar, various sizes: 287 elements, derived from moulds of local inhabitants of Newcastle-Gateshead aged 2.5-84 years. Photograph by Roman. Source: <https://www.antonygormley.com/works/exhibitions/domain-field>

The same work presented a different look in another Dutch exhibition project called *Space: Now and Then* (2005; Figure 34). From 1930 to 1997, for more than 65 years, textile factories in Tilburg became the daily habitat of thousands of people. Although these factories have only been closed for less than ten years, this type of building is disappearing from the collective memory. Different from the pure consciousness, feeling or spirit in the project in Moscow, *Space: Now and Then* awakens the wandering ordinary souls in the modern industrial era in this unique field, and invites the audience and residents to feel the life situation.



Figure 34: *Space: Now and Then, Art and Architecture, Fundament Foundation, AaBe Fabrieken, Tilburg, Netherlands, 2005. Domain Field, 2003, 4.76 mm square section stainless steel bar, various sizes: 287 elements, derived from moulds of local inhabitants of Newcastle-Gateshead aged 2.5 - 84 years. Installation view. AaBe Fabrieken, Tilburg, Netherlands, 2005. Photograph by Bob Goedew. Source: <https://www.antonygormley.com/works/exhibitions/space-now-and-then-art-and-architecture-fundament-foundation>*

4.2 Practice of Outdoor Public Space

Compared with indoor public spaces, such as museums, modern and contemporary galleries, cultural or industrial production sites, the artistic practice of outdoor public spaces is faced with more complex and changeable community relations, human-land relations and material relations. Therefore, the importance of site-specificity of the project is further highlighted. In the practice of outdoor public space in Antony Gormley, the characteristics of site-specificity are mainly manifested in the interaction with the environment and public social participation.

At the end of the 20th century, Gormley completed the increase of the presentation effect of his works through the ingenious placement of human sculpture in the environment, and appropriately turned the environment into a part of his works. For example, his earliest practice of human sculpture in a natural setting, *Land Sea and Air II* (1982; Figure 35). Three human bodies with different postures were placed by the sea, and holes were opened in different facial positions as the internal connection with the environment. Compared with the later works, the influence of the works on the audience has gained the upper hand in the confrontation between the three human sculptures and the field, and the works have occupied a dominant position in this presentation. It effectively guides the audience to return to and enter the work from the whole situation. Currently, the environmental practice of Gormley's human sculpture is still binary around the work and the environment. However, after this starting point, the roles played by the works, the environment and the audience and the relationship between them are constantly changing in his artistic practice.



Figure 35: *Land Sea and Air II*, 1982, lead and fibreglass, *Land (crouching)* 45 × 103 × 50 cm, *Sea*

(standing) 191 × 50 × 32 cm, *Air (kneeling)* 118 × 69 × 52 cm. Source:

<https://www.antonygormley.com/works/sculpture/series/three-part-lead-bodycase-works/land-sea-and-air-i>

Another Place (Figure 36) is Antony Gormley's installation for Wattenmeer, Cuxhaven, in Germany. *Another Place* was installed in Norway (1998) and Belgium (2003), and has been permanently installed in Crosby Beach in Merseyside since 2005. Here, the work is no longer an independent field that needs the audience to enter, but as a "reality" to guide or force the audience to enter a "scene", which is what Fried called "theater". Within the viewer's field of vision, everything noticed can become a part of the scene.^[26] This logic was further developed in Gormley's later practice.



Figure 36: Another Place, Cuxhaven, Germany, 1997. Another Place, 1997, Castiron, 189× 53× 29 cm (100 elements). Photograph by Helmut Kunde, Kiel. Source: <https://www.antonygormley.com/works/exhibitions/another-place-cuxhaven>

Inside Australia was installed in a 16-square-kilometer area on Lake Ballard in January 2003, and now it has been permanently installed (Figure 37). 51 works were installed in a salt lake, and the diameter of the whole field was about 750 meters. The audience can see tiny hair-like vertical lines standing on the horizon anywhere in the field. Under the hot and sharp light, the works constantly drag the audience to move in the field. When people walk towards the works or are dragged across the dazzling white lake by the works, audience leave a picture of footprints like window grilles between them. At the same time, the surface of the salt lake, like the sky, will change at every time of the year. Materials also change slowly and naturally in the environment. Culture, environment, audience and materials all participate in it dynamically.



Figure 37: Inside Australia, Lake Ballard, Australia, 2003. Inside Australia, 2003, cast alloy of iron, molybdenum, iridium, vanadium and titanium, 51 elements based on 51 inhabitants of Menzies, Western Australia. Source: <https://www.antonygormley.com/works/exhibitions/inside-australia-lake-ballard>

For the audience, the experience and participation in this field is all-round. The audience can not only enjoy visually, but also experience the environment like a sculpture through their bodies, and experience the texture and humidity of the salt lake, the temperature of the atmosphere and the resistance to movement. Audience and sculpture, body and environment, audience's life emotion and model's life emotion are connected and expanded in the field. Each sculpture has its own unique emotion. When the audience walks to the next sculpture with the memory of this sculpture, there is a connection between sculpture and sculpture, and between sculpture and audience. The audience can deeply understand the role their participation plays in the complete artistic creation. Without the participation of the audience, the project will lose its vitality. Through this project, Gormley tries to connect human beings and land in a larger perspective. The

live models of 51 works come from residents aged between 6 and 75. Indigenous and white Australia donated their bodies, experiences and emotions in this land. Gormley said: "I wanted to try to find the human equivalent for this geological place. I think human memory is part of place, and place a dimension of memory."



Figure 38: Horizon Field, Vorarlberg, Austria, 2010. Horizon Field, 2006, cast iron, 100 elements, each 189 × 53 × 29 cm, a landscape Installation in the High Alps of Vorarlberg, Austria, 2010-2012.

Photograph by Markus Tretter © Antony Gormley and Kunsthaus Bregenz. Source: <https://www.antonygormley.com/works/exhibitions/horizon-field>

In *Horizon Field* (2010), Gormley continued this mode of participation between audience and environment (Figure 38). *Horizon Field* is an art project built on the mountain, and it is also the largest landscape intervention project in Austria so far. The audience watches and measures space and distance in this field. The work consists of 100 solid cast iron human bodies, which are distributed in many communities. The project covers an area of about 150 square kilometers, forming a horizontal line at an altitude of 2039 meters. Living bodies and active consciousness participate in the field, and both skiers and hikers become part of it. *Horizon Field* focuses on the question: "Where does the human project fit within the evolution of life on this planet?" The goal of this project is still to inquire about the contact between human beings and geology, memory and landscape.

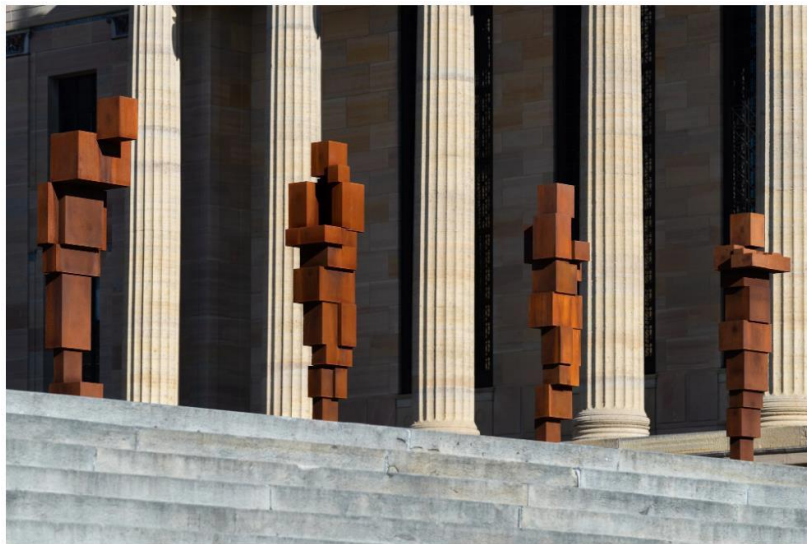


Figure 39: Stand, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, USA, 2019. Installation view. Courtesy of Philadelphia Museum of Art. Source: <https://www.antonygormley.com/works/exhibitions/stand>

Different from the outdoor natural environment, in urban public spaces constructed and inhabited by humans, the spatial forms, history, and social attributes behind public spaces become more crucial elements for Gormley to achieve interaction between his works, the public, and the environment. *Stand* (2019) consists of ten cast iron sculptures, each about ten feet high, with a fixed interval between them (Figure 39). The east terrace of the Philadelphia Museum of Art is occupied by the audience, works and museums. Looking from the bottom of the stairs, these works are in harmony with the sky. When approaching them, the museum itself appears and becomes their background. Different from heroic or idealized statues, these sculptures are more material and real, and these shapes exist to provide the audience with objects to project their subjective identity and experience. The whole column of sculptures standing in front of us is not to strengthen the myth of class, race, place or country, but to become a form of interrogation of personal experience and collective identity.

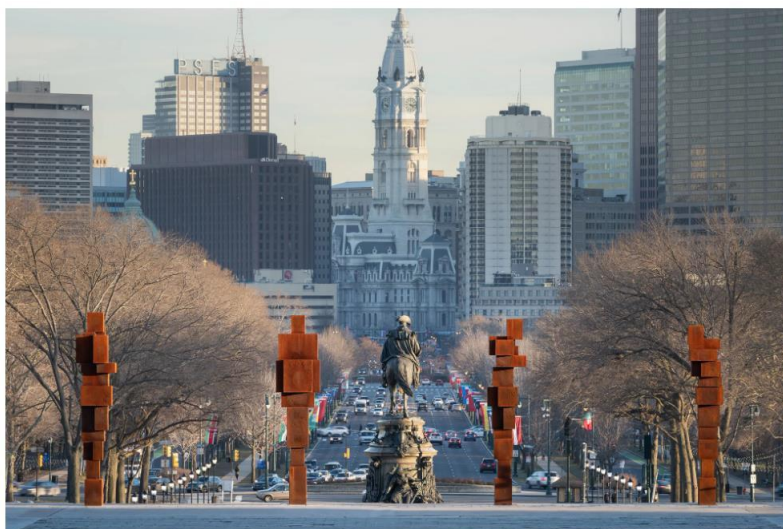


Figure 40: Stand, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, USA, 2019. Installation view. Courtesy of

Timothy Rub, the Museum's Director of Philadelphia Museum of Art, said: "Antony Gormley is, simply put, an extraordinary artist whose work has reimagined social engagement, and extended and given new meaning to an age-old tradition.....This installation, in practice as well as concept, will also enable us to fulfil in a curatorial sense one of the key goals of our strategic plan-engaging visitors by moving out into the community beyond the four walls of the Museum and activating the remarkable civic spaces around it."(Figure 40)

Event Horizon (2015-16) is the largest public art project in Hong Kong. Thirty-one sculptures were installed on the top of streets and buildings in central and Western Hong Kong (Figure 41). High-rise buildings in Central Hong Kong rise between mountains and seas, isolating the sky from the earth, while these silent human sculptures stare at the sky and ask about the position of human engineering in the planning of everything. The original idea of this project came from the first record at that time that more than half of the population on the earth lived in cities. In such a representative man-made city, Gormley questioned the relationship between the built world of mankind and the earth inherited by mankind.

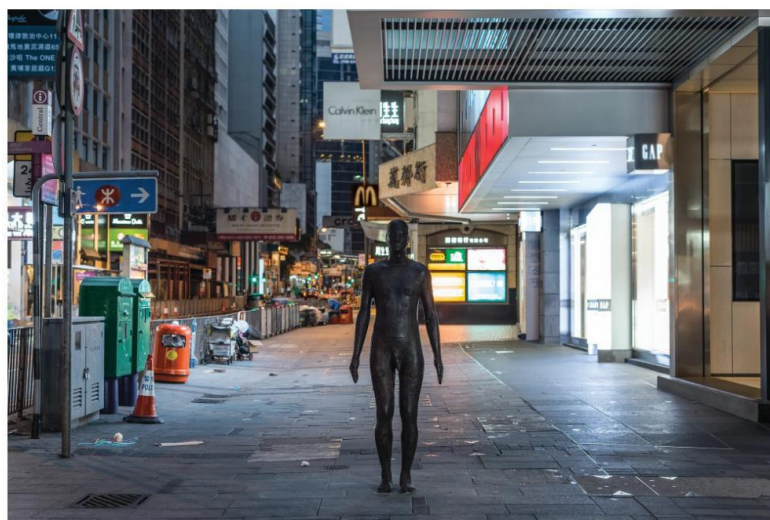


Figure 41: *Event Horizon*, Hong Kong, 2015 –16. *Event Horizon*, 2007, 27 fibreglass and 4 cast iron

figures, 189 × 53 × 29 cm (each element). Photograph by Oak Taylor -Smith. Source:

<https://www.antonygormley.com/works/exhibitions/event-horizon>

Large-scale public sculpture is also an important part of Antony Gormley's artistic practice. *Angel of The North* (1998; Figure 22), established in Newcastle in 1998, is recognized as the most outstanding masterpiece of large-scale public projects in Antony Gormley, and it is a historic work (Figure 42). This project is closely related to the social background at that time. The slope on which *Angel of The North* stands is a designated place, which is the site left after the closure of Lower Tyne Colliery. This is a tomb, marking the end of the British coal mining era, and the coal mine and steel industry are the main reasons for the formation and continuation of the local town of Gateshead in the past. The mining, manufacturing and shipbuilding industries in the northeast

of England, which are proud of and depend on for survival, seem to be entering their old age, with declining industries, population outflow and aging, and bringing negative psychological and practical effects to residents and communities.

Empathy for this social situation has become the starting point of the project. Gormley said: "I wanted to make an object that would be a focus of hope at a painful time of transition for the people of the North East, abandoned in the gap between the industrial and the information ages." Gormley hopes to resist an amnesia in the post-industrial era through *Angel of The North*, so that it can witness and constantly remind us of the industrial history of the past 200 years and hundreds of coal miners working underground, and strongly respond to the identity of residents.



Figure 42: *Angel of The North*, 1998, steel, 20 × 54 × 2.20 m. Permanent installation Gateshead, England. Commissioned by Gateshead Metropolitan Borough Council, Gateshead, England. Photograph by Colin Cuthbert, Newcastle. Source: <https://www.antonygormley.com/works/making/angel-of-the-north>

Volume is critical to Gormley's expectations. *Angel of The North* is 20 meters high and has a wingspan of 54 meters, from 200 tons weathering steel and 500 tons of concrete foundation. On the one hand, its huge volume makes it stand day and night, rain or shine. Such a huge steel creation is unique in this era. Its size and clumsiness remind people of the industrial history of Britain and the "steel behemoth" in the glorious period of industry. On the other hand, *Angel of The North*, as a landmark, can be easily seen by residents and tourists. It has become a powerful declaration, announcing the value and position of the local community, injecting a booster into residents' identity in the crisis, and enhancing their pride and sense of belonging.

At the same time, during the construction of *Angel of The North*, Antony Gormley chose the steel cast in coordination with the local coal mining industry, which brought job opportunities to residents and indirectly improved local social problems. Most importantly, this huge building has become a symbol of Newcastle and even the whole country. This provided unimaginable sightseeing resources for the local area. *Angel of The North* transformed Gateshead into a regional center for art and culture. *Angel of The North* is rooted in cultural history and social reality, responding to the past, present and future of a region, and organically combining artistic practice with social practice. From this perspective, *Angel of The North* is historic.

Different from the outdoor practice around the large-scale human sculptures such as real people, large-scale public art has created more significant social influence by virtue of its large volume. These large-scale public projects became Gormley's direct answers and powerful engagement with the questions of the times.

Antony Gormley's artistic practice easily spans indoor space and outdoor space, natural environment and man-made environment. In his artistic practice again and again, Gormley constantly explores the relationship between human body and space, nature and society, and human beings and the world, to ask the significance of human existence to himself and the world in art.

5. Conclusion

The direct starting points of Antony Gormley's art began with his exploration of the meaning of life, and his personal experience became the direct source of his artistic thinking, while minimalist sculpture and land art had a direct impact on his artistic thinking direction. These three factors lead Gormley to his most basic artistic choice, that is, to practice the relationship between body and space around the cast lead human sculpture.

Gormley's art always revolves around the core concept of "space". Body space and external space are the objects of his concern. Among them, body space includes psychological space and physiological space. In his art, Gormley constructed two ways of connection between body space and external space. First, Gormley realized the crossing of the boundary between body space and external space by describing the basic dimensions of "space", such as expansion and internality, opening and closing. Second, Gormley emphasizes two levels of external space — spatial

aesthetics in art and public space in a social context — to connect the body and space in artistic practice and social reality, ensuring that the relationship between "body" and "space" goes beyond mere conceptual discussion.

The artistic practice of Gormley public space can be divided into indoor public space practice and outdoor public space practice. In addition to the differences in physical conditions between the two spaces, the spatial attribute is also the dominant factor in this spatial practice classification. Because in indoor public space, art institutions occupy greater discourse power, and because they are born as a specific space for art display, they inevitably occupy more opportunities for art display than other indoor spaces. Questioning the traditional art exhibition space has always been an important goal in Gormley's space practice.

Environmental interaction and public participation are the key dimensions of Gormley's outdoor public space art thinking and practice. For a long time, there has been a classification of "social space-natural space" in the concept of space, to grasp the spatial attributes simply and directly. However, in Gormley's outdoor projects, there are few pure artificial spaces or natural spaces, and the two often blend together. Visual and aesthetic activities in environmental interaction are based on the audience's presence, and human sculpture as a real thing forces the audience to realize that sculpture and environment are one side of things, and then puts the subject, object and background in an equal position.

In the public participation scheme realized by Gormley, based on the unity of body space and external space in Gormley's artistic concept, the human body has become the dimension of "space". Gormley makes the audience as the subject realize that they are not only appreciators or interveners of artistic works and the environment, but also become the scale of time and space in

a wide range of physical and social spaces, which makes human beings, as decisive "observers", enter mutual generation and entanglement with the world.

In conclusion, this study examines Antony Gormley's artistic practice of human sculpture, focusing on the relationship between the body and space, and how his work engages contemporary audiences. This paper addresses the study's significance, the evolution of body and space concepts, Gormley's creative influences, his practices in various public spaces, and the unique value of his art in redefining these relationships. Antony Gormley's artistic practice provides a reference case for the presentation of contemporary art in space, and to a certain extent inspires contemporary art practitioners to rethink and harmonize the relationship between people, art and space. In Gormley's long and continuous artistic practice, he introduced a wide range of frontier concepts in the fields of politics, humanities and science into the discussion on space, which greatly enriched the contemporary connotation of the concept of space. In the end, all of Gormley's artistic thinking and practice point to the discussion about the position and significance of human life in the world.

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