

BALTIC ANISH

The studio that I used for a long time in Brixton was an old garage. This garage had been constructed between two existing buildings by roofing over the gap between them. There were consequences that arose from this. On one side windows of the adjacent studio looked directly into my studio. Of course from my side they were back-to-front: frames, sills and lintels were as if on an external wall. The containing buildings were both taller than the inserted garage. The way the rainwater run-off from the roof was organised meant that the gutters ran along the inside of my studio (before passing outside to connect to the downpipe). The outside walls of the adjacent buildings were the inside walls of my studio. On the rare occasions when it snowed, peculiarities of air circulation meant that the ventilation gap in the glazed roof tended to suck in snowflakes, covering the contents of the studio with a fine dusting. The cumulative effect of these little modifications was to give an impression of being outside whilst one was inside, or at least to confuse the two.

Some similar things can be said about Anish Kapoor's work, *Tarantara*, installed in the gutted Baltic building, prior to the commencement of building works. The tube of red vinyl stretched between the two remaining, standing walls replaced the missing end-walls and seemingly converted the building into a block with a hole through it. From the outside this was fairly simple, one saw the stretched red fabric and anticipated or imagined the mechanics of the installation, although certainly the continuity of surface between the two ends – the effect of a folding of the outside into a vortex that swept through the building – caused some complications, and the glistening, vibrant surface of the vinyl gleamed with an awesome intensity. From the inside things seemed harder to sort out. True, that to call the Baltic a 'building' any more at that time stretches the

point a bit – all that remained being two parallel, standing walls supported on their outsides by extensive scaffold frameworks. However, the closure of the end walls by means of the fabric had effectively re-established a certain completeness. But on entering the ‘building’ through a door in the side, what did one see? The fabric tube, stretched between the two ends, constricted and waisted in the middle. One had crossed a threshold and was therefore inside, but inside what? Inside the space that contained the hole that Anish had put there. One was inside the outside of a hole. A curious experience, as Alice might have observed. Entering the Church of St. Jean in Aubeter-sur-Dronne in the Charente region of France, you find yourself in a vaulted and columned space, a Romanesque interior. But this church is only a façade pressed hard against a cliff face: the space one is in has been hollowed out from the surrounding cliff, it is a building that is only inside, its architectural details carved out of solid rock. Buildings are enclosures, space contained and defined, so this church is a kind of negative, an opening – a hole even. To try and elucidate what is being called negative – imagine the Church of St. A standing alone in the village square. Someone comes along, let’s call her Rachel, who, after blocking all the apertures, fills the church with something solid, cement or plaster maybe. Once it has set hard, she carefully removes the bricks and mortar of the Church of St. A, leaving a solid shape behind. This is a positive, a solid version of the interior. This positive is then lifted by some formidable machine and pressed into an enormous block of soft and yielding matter – which is nevertheless firm enough to take an impression. The block is removed with great care, leaving behind an impression. This impression corresponds to the interior of the Church of St.A, but is the building’s negative. Standing in the church of St. Jean these questions arise, where am I? What sort of place is this in which I find myself?

Standing in the Baltic, having crossed the threshold, was not so different. The same questions needed answering. One stood in the space and saw the tube spanning the ends against the open sky above. From being a form defined by tension, tautened between the building's open ends, it became a structural member. This changed things, it was as if one stood midstream and looked up at an overarching bridge. The vinyl shape interposed into the shell of the building seemed itself to push the walls apart and to become the structure that held the building up. The sky, framed by the vertiginous and distressed walls and traversed by the flying buttress of *Tarantara*, also became something that one saw, or anyway, saw afresh. With one's perceptions conditioned by the apprehension of the building from the outside as of a penetrated block, having gone through the doorway, one was also aware of being inside the outside of a hole, of being within its surrounding substance. It was as if one were standing in solid air.

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