

# Introduction

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In “Falling Beauty,” Giorgio Agamben notes of Cy Twombly’s sculpture *Untitled*, dated from Gaeta in 1984, that it bears the English translation of some lines from Rilke, inscribed on a scroll on its base—not just any lines, but the four verses concluding the Tenth Elegy, and thus the entire cycle of the *Duino Elegies*. It is the proximity between the movement in these verses and in Twombly’s sculpture that fascinates Agamben. For both—verse and sculpture—the movement, Agamben suggests, is a “falling directly downwards,” giving form to what Hölderlin, translating Sophocles, called the *caesura*, an “anti-rhythmic suspension” that shatters and breaks a work’s upward trajectory. Such is Twombly’s gesture in his extreme sculptures, Agamben proposes, “in which every ascent is reversed and suspended, almost a threshold or caesura between an action and a non-action: Falling beauty” (13–15).

Might this be the same anti-teleological movement—“falling beauty”—of Walter Moroder’s haunting sculptures? Isolated, solitary, lonely, often female, wholly anonymous, human figures, more crypts than bodies: these sculptures give the lie to Hegel’s transcendentalizing in his *Aesthetics* of the upright human form (see Müller, *Walter Moroder: Skulpturen*). Moroder’s sculptures are reminiscent of the tradition of carving of South Tyrol, yes, perhaps also of art forms found in ancient Egypt, but in another sense, we do not know where these sculptures come from. Perhaps, as Alphonso Lingis puts it in his essay in this issue, in a discussion of the work of Antony Gormley, they are explorations in “inner space,” the caesura they occasion not unrelated to the tension between these arrested, almost suspended, human figures and, to borrow Lingis’s words, the “inner space of their bodies.” Does “falling beauty” allow us to see what sculpture in the service of metaphysics has for centuries resolutely denied, what Jacques Derrida in *Glas* calls idealism’s *remains*?

I can read this suggestion in Lingis’s essay on Antony Gormley’s work, for instance the plaster casts he made over twenty-five years of his own, always immobile,

body: standing hands at his sides and feet together, lying on the floor, or crouched in a fetal position. These sculptures, Lingis says, would not “exhibit dignity and authority like statues since the time of the Egyptian pharaohs, or make narrative gestures and show heroic deeds like the statues that populate our public buildings and parks.” Rather, they convey vulnerability, and the public’s anxiety over the imminent possibility of the extinction of human life—and of the environment, to which the “inner space” of some other of Gormley’s sculpted bodies open, as in *Three Ways Mould, Hole, Passage* (1981). His sculptures are not at home in temples or museums, not any more, Lingis writes, than “our bodies are in the white cubes of the high-rise apartments of our megacities.” Indeed, most of Gormley’s later works were installed, not in galleries and exhibition spaces, but outside, in natural environments, where his figures “no longer appropriate and subordinate or struggle against the space in which they are put.” Inert forms, yet as Lingis insists, we cannot contemplate these sculptures without gaining a sense of their (not idealized, but extended) inner spaces, “filled with life.” Falling beauty: let me close with the description Lingis provides of one of Gormley’s works:

*Another Place* consists of a hundred sculptures of iron that had filled seventeen moulds of Gormley’s body held in an immobile position and differing only slightly, with individual traits of his features and his body effaced. They were first set up in 1997 over an area of 2.5 square kilometres in mud flats outside Cuxhaven, Germany, which was one of the major ports for emigration to America in the middle of the last century. The figures look outwards toward the horizon. Daily the tide submerges them; then they emerge again. Seaweed grows about them and mussels attach themselves to them. Visitors are invited to them, to wander from one to another and to look with them toward the horizon of better places. We, with the sculptures, stand on this shore and are submerged and emerge from the mud of our life.

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#### WORKS CITED

- Agamben, Giorgio. “Falling Beauty.” *Cy Twombly: Sculptures 1992–2005*. Trans. Sarah Moore. Munich: Schirmer-Mosel, 2006. 13–15.
- Müller, Hans-Joachim. *Walter Moroder: Skulpturen*. Köln: Wienand Verlag, 2007.