

At the Hub of East and West: Anish Kapoor's Transcultural Sculpture

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On the third floor of the Hirshhorn Museum is a contained darkness that subsumes the viewer into an unfathomable abyss, the depths of the ocean or the infinitude of the cosmos. This is Anish Kapoor's fiberglass sculpture *At the Hub of Things*,¹ a hollow 'hemisphere' rendered in a dense blue tone. Reclining on the ground and angled directly at eye level, its concavity opens to the viewer's gaze, at the same time that its darkness taunts it. The light-absorbing pigment simultaneously forms the illusion of a full solid and expresses the anxiety of an unending emptiness. The gaze becomes lost in endless motion and approximation, as it never fully realizes the dimensions of the object's form or interiority. Although the object seems to be a vacuous dead end, it is actually a *hub* that opens to multiple yet convergent meanings. *At the Hub of Things* may be both interpreted as a reification of the blue-skinned Hindu goddess Kālī and positioned in the tradition of twentieth century abstract painting. The singular[izing] sculpture integrates these temporally and geographically distinct cultural motifs, subverting (by collapsing) the binary power structure that privileges the West and subjugates the East.

Anish Kapoor's oeuvre of sculptural work is characterized by simple geometric forms and single primary colors, though he manipulates scale, medium, and contour, using elements (or "languages"²) such as curves and mirrors, to distort visual experience. Critics and institutions alike tend to understand Kapoor as a sculptor who follows the generation of late modernism, particularly Abstract Expressionism. The AbEx movement that emerged from World War II's nuclear annihilation in 1950s America and Europe was defined by a conceptual annihilation of the painting as representation of subject matter. Artists in the West began to deconstruct the painting's traditional status as a depiction *of something*, seeking rather to see the canvas as a space for a more immediate and primordial mode of creation, such that the painter "gesticulate[s] upon [it]"³ without any premeditated intention and "watch[es]" for the material incarnation of his raw psyche. A significant manifestation of AbEx "gesticulat[ion]" was the *sublime*, which distilled

¹ *Figure 1*

² "What I've done over the years is to have evolved certain languages. To paraphrase, there's the pigment language, the void language, the mirror language, the wax language – as well as a few others. What I want to do is innovate in all of them." (Anish Kapoor in Conversation with Nicholas Baume)

³ Rosenberg 2-3

the painting to “a total remote presence that we can only intuit and never fully grasp.”⁴ In filling the field of vision with monochromatic washes of color, AbEx painters create “infinite, glowing voids [that] carry us beyond reason to the Sublime; we can only submit to them in an act of faith and let ourselves be absorbed into their radiant depths.”⁵ In this “act of faith,” the work of art becomes akin to divinity.

Kapoor’s own sculpturally rendered “voids [of] radiant depths” not only tend to be placed in a post-AbEx context, the artist himself has said that he is influenced by Abstract Expressionism. Kapoor explicitly points to the painter Barnett Newman as the “vanguard of modernism.” Newman painted in the tradition of non-compositional fields of color, though he interjects them with a fracturing vertical line.⁶ According to Kapoor, the “space in the middle of the canvas [...] seemed to open to a space beyond. This language of deep abstraction seems to be a language of an inner world. I believe this is where art comes from and what art must speak about.”⁷ Kapoor’s own sculptural recesses are often analyzed in relation to Newman’s vertical fractures.⁸ In the Material Gestures wing of the Tate Modern,⁹ which exhibits “new forms of abstraction and expressive figuration” in postwar America and Europe, Kapoor’s *Ishi’s Light* is placed face-to-face with two of Newman’s color field paintings, *Adam* and *Eve*,¹⁰ such that they are in dialogue. Similarly, the immersive monochromatic cavity of *At the Hub* resonates with, and even sculpturally translates,¹¹ the “inner world” of Newman’s painted fields of color.

However, posturing Kapoor’s sculptures in the Euro-/ Ameri-centric genre of late modernism, as the Tate has done, underrates the mythic spirituality of his sculptures’ “inner world,” which emerges from a turn to Eastern culture. Art historian Partha Mitter is critical of the hierarchy that is inherent in the

⁴ Rosenblum 242

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ *Figure 2*

⁷ Weiner, Julia. “Interview: Anish Kapoor is the biggest name in art.” *The Jewish Chronicle* (2009).

⁸ Rainer Crone and Alexandra von Stosch “look at a discursive dialogue between the works of C.D. Friedrich, Barnett Newman, and Anish Kapoor” in order to understand the twentieth century artists’ aspiration to the “sublime”

⁹ “This work invites you to peer into the vertical split in its enveloping, egg-like shape. As you do, you see your distorted image shining back, upside down. You also see, inverted, two large paintings by Barnett Newman: *Eve* (1950) and *Adam* (1952) – hovering presences from the wall behind you” (Smith 64)

¹⁰ *Figure 2*

¹¹ “The sheer scale of the blinding monochrome with the deep recession at its centre, which magnetizes the viewers and immerses them into the sensational experience of vibrant color [is] in an almost literal translation of the powerful draw exerted by Barnett Newman’s fields of colour.” (Philippou, Styliane. “Anish Kapoor: Non-objective Objects.” 2009)

modernist canon, as it marginalizes the East and regards it as a “cultural periphery.”¹² Kapoor creates from the diasporic experience of a globalized and decolonized world, which distinguishes him from the twentieth century modernists of New York. He was born in Mumbai, India in 1954 to a Punjabi father and Jewish/ Middle Eastern mother. In 1973, he moved to London to study art.¹³ During a trip back to India in 1979, Kapoor was influenced by the open-domed architecture of mosques and observatories, as well as the spice-based pigments he found near temples. These mineral colors, which he found to radiate an “internal energy,” became one of his main mediums. Thus, both the artist and his art “belong to a multiple heritage.”¹⁴ His first series of works, made between 1979 and 1982, is titled *1000 Names*, a reference to the Hindu deity Vishnu, who has 1000 names to convey that the divine may take any of multiple forms. At the same time, it suggests the 1000 various classifications and associations that cohere around even a single one of Kapoor’s sculpture. However, critical discourse on Kapoor rarely discusses the Hindu motifs as more than superficial allusions, only one of the names rather than *the* 1000 names.

At the Hub of Things, created in 1987, is perhaps the only sculpture that has been understood predominantly through the context of his Hindu heritage. According to Evelyn Hankins, the curator of the Hirshhorn exhibit that actually takes its name from *At the Hub of Things*, the sculpture is a symbolic representation of the blue-skinned goddess Kālī.¹⁵ At the Freer and Sackler Galleries, a national museum of Asian Art, the sculpture was lent to an exhibition (1999) titled “Devī: The Great Goddess.”¹⁶ Devī is the “divine female principle in her guises of mother, lover, warrior, creator and destroyer,”¹⁷ one of those guises being the dark blue Kālī. According to the Freer, Kālī’s power comes from “feared darkness and an apprehension of eternity,” a sensation that is epitomized in the experience of gazing into the sculpture’s hollowness. Although both the Hirshhorn and the Freer and Sackler’s connection of the sculpture to Kālī

¹² Mitter 532

¹³ First at the Horsney College of Art and then at the Chelsea School of Art and Design. According to Mitter, he is “claimed by Britain and at present courted by India.”

¹⁴ Mitter 541

¹⁵ “At the Hub of Things: New Views of the Collection’ Forges New Links Among the Hirshhorn’s Modern and Contemporary Holdings.” *Smithsonian Newsdesk* (2014).

¹⁶ <http://www.asia.si.edu/devi/index.htm>

¹⁷ Cotter, Holland. “She’s Ur-Mother, Warrior, Lover: Isn’t She Divine?” *The New York Times* (NY, NY), Jul.25, 1999. According to Cotter, Devī was a supreme goddess in India, until Aryan invaders “arrived with their patriarchal religion around 1500 BC. After that, she was often assigned the supporting role of spouse to male gods.”

is a departure from the dominant modernist perspective, it still views the sculpture through a “monolithic, linear narrative.”¹⁸ This perpetuates the idea that Hinduism and modernism are mutually exclusive, assuming that each work necessarily privileges one cultural analysis over the other. Kapoor himself has said, “I just thought of myself as an artist.”¹⁹ He has never wanted to be defined as a necessarily Indian artist, or a British artist, seeking only to act as an “independent agent: not one held hostage by anterior histories of location and ethnographic description.”²⁰

Several scholars, such as Partha Mitter and Nicholas Baume, suggest that Kapoor’s body of work is a “cultural hybrid,” equally incorporating themes from both modernist abstraction and Hindu symbology. However, these hybrid analyses regard modernism and Hinduism as parallel but *separate* contexts for interpreting Kapoor’s sculptures. This essay moves beyond a basic comparison of West and East as separate frameworks, even when parallel, interpenetrating them through an examination of *At the Hub of Things*. In his conclusion about Kapoor, Thomas McEvelley states, “On the one hand, it reverses the colonial relationship, incorporating the aims of the imperialist Modernist power into the forms of the colonized culture that is its vaster matrix [...] In another sense, the colonial culture is subsumed into that of the urban imperial center, betrayed.”²¹ This paper argues that Kapoor’s sculpture, *At the Hub of Things* in particular, collapses the division between these two interpretations, collapsing the power structure entirely. The viewer’s relation to the sculpture is initially analogous to the dialectic between the West as the gazing subject and the East as the object of the gaze. The viewer beholds and “others” the object, a representation of Kālī that serves as metonymy for India. However, Kālī takes revenge by absorbing the viewer in its interior, closing the gap between “self and “other,” West and East. The modernist’s aspiration for the “essential spirit” culminates in an encounter with the divine goddess Kālī.

The most immediate impression of the sculpture is its form, which is a physical inversion, challenging conventional conceptions of the sculpture as a solid object of mass. As it is displayed, the

¹⁸ Mitter 544

¹⁹ Kapoor in conversation with Greg Hilty and Andrea Rose

²⁰ Adajania

²¹ McEvelley 227

protuberant form of *At the Hub of Things* faces away from the viewer, obscuring the curve's "hub."

Moreover, the sculpture seems to be part of an ellipsoid cut in half, implying that it is a partiality rather than a whole. At the center, the viewer is foremost confronted with the open-ended cavity, rendering a *space*. These elements form a contrast to the conventional sculpture, a static object that asserts its absolute physicality through horizontal projection or vertical erection. With this sculpture, the viewer's gaze is no longer fixed; rather, it is incited to rove the form.²² Already, the instability of the sculpture unsettles its place in canonical Western sculpture. The motion of the sculpture, and thus the viewer's gaze, demonstrates a visually erotic act. Endogenous to this motion is the form's feminine contours. Its round convex form evokes the swelling of pregnancy, as its concave form evokes the womb.

Taken together, the object "appear[s] as [a] birth."²³ According to Kapoor, "It's to do with origin [...] which I feel to be feminine [...] I think this is also very Eastern. Western sculpture is a phallic art. My work seems to be the opposite."²⁴ Here, Kapoor echoes Edward Said's metaphor of the phallicentric West, which penetrates and colonizes the East, or the "Orient," the feminized space with all its exoticism and sensuality.²⁵ As both Bhabha and Mitter elucidate, the West's modernist canon imperially appropriated Indian culture, associating it with the West's fantasies about the exotic and dangerous Orient, to advance its own subversive avant-garde while obscuring its Eastern origins.²⁶ Kapoor identifies with this, as he says, "What is interesting is that there have been a significant number, since the mid-19th century [...] of European artists who have been able to look East [...] They've been able to look to the other world and make that part of the Western tradition. It's never happened the other way around."²⁷ Through *At the Hub of Things*, Kapoor literally inverts the Western form, rendering it *the other way*

²² This relationship echoes the way that in Barnett Newman's fields of color, "the eye [...] pulls in and pushes out [...] back and forth [...] side by side."

²³ Tazzi

²⁴ Meer (*BOMB*)

²⁵ "The sexual objection of Oriental women to Western men fairly stands for the pattern for the pattern of relative strength between East and West and the discourse about the Orient ... Orientalism takes perverse shape as a 'male power fantasy' that sexualizes a feminized Orient for Western power and possession" (Said, qtd. in Urban 172)

²⁶ Mitter 542

²⁷ Meer (*BOMB*)

around, to overturn this power structure. The sculpture demonstrates that the feminine, and the Eastern, is an “origin,” a *hub* of birth and generation.

Specifically, the sculpture’s femininity evokes the figure of the goddess Kālī, the dark form of Devī. The *Upanishads*, the sacred Sanskrit scriptures that form the basis of Hindu theosophy, conceptualizes Kālī as the “mother-source of all Being.”²⁸ She encapsulates the cycle of time, as she simultaneously births the universe and devours it when it returns to her in death. According to the myth of origin in the late medieval text *Mahābhāgavata Purāna*, she “orchestrates creations, preservation, and destruction, the matriarch of the world.”²⁹ In her anthropomorphic form, she is traditionally depicted naked with wild hair and lolling tongue, holding decapitated heads and standing on Śhiva,³⁰ her male counterpart.³¹ Perhaps because certain texts characterize her as the enraged form of Devī, leaping into being to slaughter demons, Western discourse beginning in the nineteenth century advanced the perception that “Kālī epitomized an alien other.”³² Particularly in the British imagination, the Indian female, as embodied in Kālī, was thought to be “excessively sexual, dark and seductive, insatiable in her carnal appetites.”³³ This is a distorted and one-dimensional portrayal that calls for a more balanced, and also more complex, understanding of Kālī.

She is not a unitary goddess but a “multiple mothering,” a “succession of Kalis, each swallowing the other up.” According to the *Mahanirvana-tantra*,

“At the dissolution of things, it is Kala [Time] Who will devour all [...] Because Thou devourest Kala, Thou art Kali, the original form of all things, and because Thou art the Origin of and devourest all things Thou art called the Adya [primordial] Kali. Resuming after Dissolution Thine

²⁸ Jacob 127

²⁹ qtd. in Dold 40

³⁰ “In Hindu iconography, the conjoined sexualities of Shiva and Kali are represented above all in the lingam-and-yoni icon, a representation of the cosmic phallus and vagina engaged in sexual embrace,” generating the universe (McEvelley)

³¹ *Figure 4*

³² In 1933, the British Lieutenant-General Sir George Macmunn suggested that Kali embodies the “ancient horror” of India. In the India Museum, London, a statue of Kali represents her devouring a corpse, a “*singular* portrayal of the goddess [that] has led to overstatements concerning her destructive side.”

³³ Urban 173, Dold 41-42

own form, dark and formless [...] without beginning, multiform by the power of Maya, Thou art the Beginning of All, Creatrix, Protectress, and Destructress that Thou Art.” (4.30-34)³⁴

Thus, she conceives the entirety of human history, not as a linear schema as the West does, but as a “global narrative with multiple temporalities.”³⁵ Kālī demonstrates a worldview that is open to the coexistence of the ancient East and the modern West. Kapoor’s sculpture, at the same time that it challenges traditional portrayals of the goddess, holds up Kālī as the way to subvert the West-centered hierarchy that is embedded in our constructed history.

The sculpture takes on another layer of meaning through the layer of powdered pigment that enshrouds the solid.³⁶ The medium, called *kumkuma*, originates from native India, where it is amassed at Hindu temples and used during the ritual performances of the Holi Festival (Festival of Colors). In these festivals, the powder is thrown into the air and becomes an immaterial vapor. McEvelley reads this vapor as an expression of the modernists’ aspiration for the transcendence of matter and elevation to pure spirit.³⁷ Through both frames of reference, the sculpture alludes to the spiritual, demonstrating a tension between its grounded physicality and its ethereal quality. Curator Nicholas Baume refers to “how slender [its] grasp on objecthood must be if comprised of so evanescent a substance.”³⁸ This “slender” tension is further evident in the way that the powder, a delicate amalgam of particles, is applied in a harsh opaque impasto. Impasto is used by many AbEx painters to “reflect an emphasis on gesture and the physical presence of paint itself.”³⁹ The visceral texture of the surface imbues *At the Hub of Things* with a corporeal “presence.” In this way, the sculpture itself is defined by the tension, and integration, of the

³⁴ Qtd. in Kinsley 29

³⁵ “The pressing problem for globalized art history and its particular periodization is that it exacerbates the difference between Western approaches to art and the critical traditions of other cultures [...] The question, however, is, if one wishes to construct a global narrative with multiple temporalities that are incommensurate with one another, how would one go about it? [...] Unless power relations change, heterochronicity will never stand a chance.” (Mitter 384-5)

³⁶ *Figure 4*

³⁷ McEvelley 223

³⁸ Baume 16

³⁹ <https://www.artsy.net/gene/impasto>

spiritual and the corporeal. This underscores the instability of the sculpture, as it subverts the viewer's possession; it refuses to be objectified.

Kapoor further denaturalizes the medium of the sculpture through its deep blue color, which expresses the cosmic or the divine. It points to both the blue-black skin of the goddess Kālī ~~and the cloak of the Virgin Mary in Renaissance painting~~. Furthermore, the hue points to space, as in the universe, transforming the powder into cosmic dust. The object, then, seems to be “not of this world,” and thus “independent of time and space.”⁴⁰ According to McEvelley, blue is the “paramount color of Modernism, or at any rate of the cult of the abstract sublime.” Interestingly, for the modernist Yves Klein, who engineered his own International Klein blue color for a series of monochrome paintings,⁴¹ “each painting, as well as its material reality, was impregnated with an immaterial quality,” the sublime, through the color blue as “intermediary.”⁴² Kapoor renders this impregnation of the sublime through the sculpture's pregnant form, which simultaneously (dually) iterates Kālī the mother-spirit. In other words, the modernist sublime *is* the divine Kālī; they become one and the same through the sculpture. In medium and color, the sculpture interstitches and ultimately conflates the modernist sublime and the Hindu divine. Through this state, the object is “not of this world” and thus not subject to the temporal and spatial conditions that separate ancient from modern, East from West.

The pigment takes on further significance (beyond its blue hue) as the raw “skin” of the object. Kapoor says, “The skin of an object is what defines it.” Indeed, the skin is the bounds that demarcate an object's existence. Bhabha invokes Heidegger to explain, “The potter takes hold of the impalpable void and brings it forth as the containing vessel.”⁴³ This suggests that the void and the object are not distinct; the sculpture comes into being through the skin. Like the jug, it is “double” in the sense that it is simultaneously a form and an emptiness, a material and a void. By creating difference where there

⁴⁰ “Great art remains stable and unobscured because the feelings that it awakens are *independent of time and place*, because its kingdom is *not of this world*” (Bell, italics mine).

⁴¹ *Figure 5*

⁴² “Indeed, through blue he gradually theorized on colour as a transition from the bodily to the spiritual.” In the *Grande Anthrophagie bleue*, “it recalls the ambivalence of the flesh, at once earthly and spiritual...”

(*Yves Klein: Body, Colour, Immaterial*, 2006-7, Centre Pompidou)

⁴³ Bhabha 19

originally was none, the skin initiates an “otherness,” an *alterity*.⁴⁴ This resonates strongly with the motif of nakedness in the *Upanishads*, as “He who inhabits the skin, yet is within the skin, [...] whose body the skin is [...] – He is your Self.”⁴⁵ The surface of the body, and its nakedness, defines and *is* the body. However, the material of *At the Hub* resembles *flayed* skin, a motif of Kapoor’s sculptures that expresses “a kind of moulting, a shedding of the skin, of the membrane that separates boundaries and places, the removal of familiar parameters.”⁴⁶ In the *Upanishads*, the “dematerialisation of the body” is equivalent to “disembodiment,” which is a liberating “release.”⁴⁷

The viewer experiences this “release” when confronting the sculpture full on. The form “releases,” opens like a parabola, no longer enclosed or defined by skin. Initially, the sculpture seems to be a filled and enclosed solid. The dark pigment absorbs light, obscuring any possible gradation in the value.⁴⁸ As such, all the eye beholds is a black flatness. However, it gradually becomes apparent that the object’s flatness (or fullness) is an optical illusion. The sculpture is *empty*. The surface that, as Bhabha says, enforces division and otherness, is annihilated. The annihilation of the “skin” renders an “open body.” Arno Böehler explains the ancient Hindu concept of an “open body” by citing Jean-Luc Nancy: “Bodies are never a complete entity [...] but an open space [...] they are what we call a site.”⁴⁹ According to the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upanishads*, bodies are not limited to their local form, but extend to a “world-wide plane, [a] luminous field [*loka*].”⁵⁰ In beholding the sculpturally open body, the viewer similarly begins to “experience oneself outside or beyond the limits of one’s own skin.”⁵¹ Quoting the French philosopher Emmanuel Lévinas, Doris von Drathen says, “At every moment the face of the *other* destroys and eclipses [...] To approach the other [...] therefore means *receiving* the other beyond the capacity of one’s self, of one’s *I*.”⁵² Through its openness, the sculpture is no longer an isolated, neutral object. The

⁴⁴ Indeed, is it not true that cultural differences are marked by the geographical borders we draw and the color of our skin?

⁴⁵ Nikhilananda 57

⁴⁶ Von Drathen

⁴⁷ Böehler 109

⁴⁸ *Figure 6*

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ This is reminiscent of Barnett Newman’s extended fields of color.

⁵¹ Von Drathen 186

⁵² *Ibid.* 187

viewer is pulled into its emptiness, and as such, (metaphorically) meets the Hindu other and *receives it*. The sculpture, then, does not only refer to the feminized East. It creates a site, or a *hub*.

Moreover, within the sculptural void, the pigment is so dark that the “site” is extended indefinitely, becoming perceptually bottomless. Just like it is impossible to see the “hub” of the form’s curve, the viewer cannot fathom the depth of the void. The experience of viewing the sculpture engenders an endless motion – in and out, back and forth, side to side.⁵³ Therefore, the sculpture is not only a point of intersection, but a *space* of interaction. It encompasses an entire “inner world,” and the viewer is compelled to move from exteriority to interiority, lightness to darkness, form to abstraction. Conventionally, the viewer fixes and projects the gaze on the passive object, just as the West projects itself on the East. *At the Hub of Things* enacts a “revenge” on this dynamic by compelling the viewer to navigate it through motion. The next part of the paper examines the multiple meanings of this motion.

Although much of Kapoor’s work is rendered on a colossal scale, *At the Hub of Things* demonstrates that an object does not need to be physically immense to *express* immensity. The sculpture is situated on the floor and reaches a height of about five feet, so that it is equal to the viewer’s elevation. The viewer and the sculpture face each other, forming an engagement between two bodies, or two sites. With a reading by Tony Bond, the art object is a metaphorical “veil” mediating between physical reality (where the viewer stands) and an abstract space “beyond.”^{[54] [55]} This space beyond may be understood as the unconscious, the divine, or the (modernists’ ideal) sublime. Pier Luigi Tazzi’s analysis of Kapoor echoes this idea in suggesting, “The work in its opacity [is] a screen between the subject and the void [...] between the place of the subject and the space of *desire*.”⁵⁶ Desire is defined by the subject’s (Orientalist) fantasies of possessing the other, which reduces the other to an object of the gaze.

⁵³ Likens it to Barnett Newman’s extended fields of color (Bhabha 30)

⁵⁴ Bond conveys a metaphor of two boundless cosmos mirroring each other, touching at a singularity point or black hole – the *void* embodied as the art object. It’s “at the hub of things.”

⁵⁵ Samkhya, the ancient Indian dualist philosophy and its belief in the two constant polarities in the universe, prakriti (material essence) and purusha (consciousness)

⁵⁶ *Desire* is an essential concept to both the modern psychoanalysts – Freud, Lacan, Hegel – and Orientalists.

This division is collapsed through Michael Fried's theory on modernist art, whereby the viewing subject "negate[s] his own viewing position" and "merge[s]"⁵⁷ with the art object, thus overcoming the "self-division" between the subject and the object, the "seer and seen." This is highly theoretical, but it is evident in the way that the experience of Kapoor's sculpture necessarily frustrates the gaze of the "seer" on the "seen." Its emptiness draws the viewer into its depths, enforcing a "merge" with its interiority. According to Bond, modernist art incites an "affective participation."⁵⁸ The viewer who stands "at the hub" moves around the form, practically circumambulating it,⁵⁹ to attempt at realizing its full dimensions. As the viewer moves from side to side, the eye correspondingly moves from the sculpture's external form to its internal depths. The viewer is no longer visually projecting; Bhabha likens the experience to the psychoanalytic phenomenon of introjection, whereby the "human subject transposes 'objects' from the outside to the inside of itself through the passageway of the Unconscious."⁶⁰ ~~The "Unconscious" is analogous to the "space beyond" that Bond invokes.~~ Ultimately, the viewer merges with the object, and is thus taken "elsewhere where the distinction between the subject that looks and the object – upon which the look rests – does not exist."⁶¹

That the "merge" happens through a space beyond, *elsewhere*, is an important idea. In experiencing the sculpture, the deep blue becomes indistinguishable from pitch black. According to Tazzi, whose essay on Kapoor is entitled "Journey," the "interval is a passage."⁶² In other words, the "screen" is manifests a movement to the "space beyond." In the sacred architecture of Hindu temples, which is meant to model the universe, the darkest point is the center, the locus of divinity. Traditionally, "penetration towards the deity [...] is always through a progression from light into darkness, from open and large spaces to a confined and small space [...] culminating in the focal point of the temple."⁶³ *At the Hub of Things* is about a passage to the blackest "hub," where one discovers the divine. The divine is "something

⁵⁷ In *Coubert's Realism*, Fried discusses a kind of "quasi-corporeal merger" (qtd. In Bond)

⁵⁸ Bond

⁵⁹ Interestingly, ancient Hindu temples are meant to be circumambulated (*pradakshina*) in a clockwise direction: "This circumambulation is a rite constituting a bodily participation in movements an prayer" (Michell 66)

⁶⁰ Bhabha 32

⁶¹ Tazzi 110

⁶² Tazzi 108

⁶³ Michell 70

here, which is something inside, something not here.” According to Kapoor, his sculptures generate a darkness that “is resident in you already; that you know already [...] That’s why sculpture occupies the same space as your body.”⁶⁴ That, too, is why the Eastern other occupies the same space as the Western self. The “passage,” as it is internalized in the sculpture, is about taking the divine and locating it within the self.⁶⁵ Within us, we all encompass this hub, where the separation of self and other dissolves.

At the hub of things is a space of *creation*. Tazzi says that the passage is “like birth.” For all of us, there is a terror that comes with going into the dark and being subsumed in the void. But the void is a generative emptiness. At the center of the Hindu temple is a chamber, the *gharbhagriha*, which is the womb- or embryo-chamber. The womb, as it is incarnate in ancient architecture and the goddess Kali, is where something new may be born.⁶⁶ Therefore, as Kapoor says, the hub is a “metaphor for a state of *becoming*.” Through the passage of this essay, Anish Kapoor’s sculpture has *become* truly transcultural. And in gazing upon the sculpture, in “becoming” absorbed in its oscillating depths, we are able to experience a “site” where there is no false binary between self and other, West and East.

⁶⁴ Anish Kapoor In conversation with John Tusa

⁶⁵ “This is where the modernist and the Asian coincide very well; the modernist art that I admire views the self as a springboard from which the work takes on a life of its own. You find a very similar attitude in Asian art, where the self isn’t the entity out of which all expression is determined. The self is only a means”

⁶⁶ This is reminiscent of Yves Klein’s *impregnating* material space to create a distinct work of art.