Choose a building you have visited and that you love and write a description of it, analysing why you like it.

The Deer Shelter Skyspace at the Yorkshire Sculpture Park is an example of two styles, that of antiquity and modernity, merging into one. The grade 2 listed former deer shelter has been adapted by James Turrell into one of his art pieces- mainly inside the building holding the peaceful ‘Skyspace’. The shelter is situated on the Bretton Estate parkland which has been owned by various affluent families throughout its history and dates from c.1770s. There was a classical resurgence in England at this time, the vogue being Neoclassicism, and this is evident in the façade of the building as well as its setting. This is put in contrast with Turrell’s clean, pure interior- harmoniously binding the old with the new.

As you walk down the tumbling green hill from the YSP visitor centre, there is no obvious indication of the deer shelter; only the wide, picturesque landscape that almost engulfs you, like a serene Gainsborough painting. Only once you walk as far down as Henry Moore’s ‘Draped Seated Woman’ is it that you notice the drop in the hill on your left as the façade of the shelter emerges from the undergrowth. Walking through the wooden gates, that are kept closed by a thick ring of rope, into the pen-like enclosure, you feel almost like one of the deer from the shelter’s past (Fig.1).

From the building’s façade (Fig.2), the deer shelter looks like a newly discovered ancient ruin. Although built in the 1770s, its features hark classical designs. Its three great arches, narrow red brick and the way it sits submerged in the rolling grassy hill are all features that we associate with an artifact from antiquity. The building that it is most reminiscent of is the remains of the Basilica of Maxentius and Constantine (Fig.5) in the Roman forum. The resemblance is clear in many ways: its broad deep barrel vaulted arches, although smaller in scale, make up the shelter’s façade and produce the great shadows that provide the main sense of interest to the building; the narrow brick that not only the basilica is composed of, but is also typical of early Roman architecture; the fact it's almost part of the hill and part of nature is similar to the state of the unused basilica. Compositionally, as mentioned earlier, the main source of interest in the building is in its satisfyingly arched vaults. However, the shelter is also very aesthetically harmonious; vertical, horizontal and curved forms are addressed. The shelter is wider than it is tall therefore the emphasis is on the horizontal, which gives the building a sense of weight and stability. The shelter looks like an ancient ruin that has been left plunged in the undergrowth for nature to overpower it; just as the basilica has.

Inside the deer shelter (Fig.3 and 4), the complete juxtaposition in style is clear. On first look, the whole Neoclassical ideal vanishes. As you step over the threshold inside one of the dark arches, you are welcomed by small, bright floor lights in a smooth, geometric passage that guide you to the central portal, on the right, in a kind of futuristic, spaceship-like manner. Once you reach the portal, you are met with a square row of grey stone benches that line the room and as you look up the white walls, your eyes are drawn to the light source: the central square aperture, opening us to the elements.

Despite the linear modernity in its style, a feeling of tradition still remains. The room feels almost like a Protestant church; a place of unembellished worship. Like a Protestant church, there is a noticeable semantic field of transcendence when we are immersed in this clean, pure colour palette of light grey and white. This allows for a simple and unsoiled appearance and encourages a sense of cleansing in ourselves. It urges us to clear our minds of any unnecessary clutter; any unneeded thoughts- just as the pristine walls have been cleansed of any unessential decoration or unwanted dirt. This kind of tabula rasa effect leaves us in a state of quiet contemplation yet paradoxically, it also allows us to stop thinking at all; we are lead into a full state of peace.

Similarly in a Protestant church, there is a sense of understated glory. This is shown through the only sense of vibrancy we can see: the blue of the sky, framed by the opening in the ceiling. Even this richer colour potentially provokes a sense of glory; despite not being specifically a religious place, we can associate this with the purity of the Virgin Mary and her drapery; perhaps the colour of heaven itself.

Solidifying this idea of glory further is the tall backs to the benches. They are almost throne-like in their appearance; as you sit on them you are filled with a feeling of importance, even regality. The accentuated length of them is echoed in the great height of the room itself as they slant back into the wall encouraging you to look up- up towards the light. In addition, despite the small sense of the horizontal in the seats themselves, the backs provide a greater stress on the vertical; your eyes are drawn up their elongated bodies, again, leading you to the aperture. You are exposed with the beam of natural light- as if you are being anointed with glory; glowing in your royal throne.

In contrast, there is also an essence of antiquity in the room. We can associate some features with that seen in Roman architecture: the aperture. This element is similar to the 'compluvium' (Fig.6) seen in Roman villas; they are square holes in the ceiling to allow light into the entrance room, the 'atrium', of a villa. Unlike the deer shelter however, a villa would also have an 'impluvium', which is a pool used to collect rainwater from the opening, and the remainder of the room would be highly decorated (Fig.7)- a place to impress and converse with guests. In this sense, the room has a greater likeness to the 'Pazzi Chapel' (Fig.8), in Florence. The centre of the room inside the chapel, like the deer shelter, is indicated by an opening in the ceiling and by which benches are orientated, lining the room. The use of benches in each building both provide the same sense of community and quiet intimacy- the idea that everyone shares one long seat and can be physically touching one another. The chapel was once a Chapter House for Franciscan monks to gather and listen as one would read a chapter of the 'Rule of St Benedict'; similarly as we sit together quietly in the shelter. Adding to this, the shared use of light stone in these seats accentuates the sense of contemplation; the permanency and weight of the material provokes the idea that this reflection is not a transient act- it is a long-lasting experience. Again, although the apertures differ in shape, the chapel's being an 'oculus' rather than a square opening, both buildings share that ethereal light that shines on those gathered below it. Despite being a Renaissance building, it in itself alludes to a structure from antiquity: the Pantheon (Fig.9 and 10), in Rome with its great oculus. Unlike the Pazzi Chapel yet like the deer shelter, the only source of light is the oculus; the chapel also had windows on its ground level. The Pantheon has a typically Greek temple- like façade and inside held a circular, domed room with an oculus in its ceiling. Not only do we recognize this sense of contrast between tradition and modernity, the dome being the first of its kind and therefore modern for the time, but also the emphasis and concentration on the sky above and the beam of light leading from it. Conclusively, the interior of the shelter could not be more different to its exterior; yet in feeling, it shares the sense of antiquity.

The quality of light inside the shelter is surprisingly intense. The only source of light, as mentioned, originates from the square opening in the ceiling and the natural, organic nature of it makes us doubt its power. However, not only does the square shape of the opening aid this, but also the bright, clean hue of the room. The colour palette provided through the grey stone seating and white painted walls only heightens the effect of the sunlight but the opening, like a camera aperture, allows the light to be dispersed evenly throughout the space. The scale of the aperture to the floor space is increased; the area widens. In a sense the shelter is like a film camera- the aperture allows the optimum level of light into its body for the film to absorb; the opening exposes us to the perfect light intensity to capture the ever changing image of the sky.

The building relates to its setting both stylistically and aesthetically. When the shelter was built in the c.1770s, the fashion at this time was Neoclassicism- a style of classical revival. The shelter is set into a hill and as well as being surrounded by nature, looks out on the bucolic parkland beyond it. The way in which the hill blankets the building in foliage provides a classical element to its appearance; it is as if the shelter is an ancient ruin that has been overthrown by nature through its neglect. This effect was something desired by the aristocracy in England as influenced by the famous Neoclassical artists of the time. For example, Giovanni Battista Piranesi was an engraver, made well known in the country by his friend and the famous designer Robert Adams, who shaped the country's conceptions of ancient ruins. In particular his dramatic, romantically unkempt depictions were the only images some had of the Roman forum and were what inspired rich Englishmen- notably the architect Sir John Soane who kept many of his works. Like Soane, young wealthy gentlemen would be influenced by Piranesi and collect his prints as souvenirs from the Grand Tour- a popular, cultural tour through Europe. Like these portrayals, the deer shelter was designed in this fashion; more specifically like Piranesi's depiction of the 'Basilica of Maxentius and Constantine' (Fig.11) to which the shelter, as mentioned earlier, is reminiscent; as well as the ruins overthrown with debris in his 'Veduta di Campo Vaccino' (Fig.12) which depicts a view over the forum with the image of the Arch of Septimius Severus with its torso enveloped in debris. The shelter was the perfect component to complete the stylistic ideal of the late 18th century.

In addition, the landscape on which the original deer would have roamed and that the shelter looks upon is also typical of the neoclassical period. Although not strictly in the neoclassical era, landscape painters such as Claude Lorrain also created serene depictions that were desirable to the rich and fashionable of the time: his involvement of classical architecture; his allusion to a mythological scene; as well as his cooler, less dramatic composition is what separates him from the fashions of the baroque and rococo at the time he produced this. The vogue was to combine classical architecture with the 'sublime' qualities of nature. When we look upon the shelter and its setting, and if we imagine the presence of deer, the scene is not too dissimilar to Lorrain's 'Landscape with Ascanius Shooting the stag of Sylvia’ (Fig.13). Each of the scenes share calm tranquil trees and grass, a partially preserved, ancient ruin and a noble stag. It is as if we are looking upon our own idyllic, mythological Lorrain landscape.

In a more aesthetic sense, the building harmoniously blends into its setting which makes it pleasing to gaze upon. Again, the way it is engulfed and set into the hill allows it to appear part of nature. The shelter does not obstruct nature in this sense and this is accentuated by its curvaceous body; the round arches of the shelter emulate the tumbling curves of the hill itself. Furthermore, the building is tonally in keeping with its earthy setting; the organic rust colour of the brick and the subtle beige of the rock from which the shelter is composed, do not distract from or overwhelm the surroundings. It is as if the shelter melts into its setting and is in no way incompatible with nature.

In conclusion, I love the Deer Shelter at the Yorkshire Sculpture Park for its contrasts. The juxtaposition between the exterior and interior add an element of surprise and allow us to simultaneously explore different feelings of glory and grandeur, peace and serenity; each against the different historical foils of classicism and modernity. Although a simple, undecorated building, its subtlety and its concentration on provoking feeling and images is what makes it far more interesting than any lavish Cathedral or palace. The way it encourages us to just 'be'; to forget about time or bad thoughts or even thought all together, I think is a powerful achievement.

Bibliography

Books:

**The story of Architecture –** PatrickNuttgens

**The story of Art –** E H Gombrich

**Analyzing Architecture –** Simon Unwin

**James Turrell Deer Shelter: An Art Fund Commission –** Clare Lilley and Caroline Bugler

**Ways of Looking –** Ossian Ward

Websites:

**Wikipedia**

**(The appendix to this essay is given with the hard copy- the complete document was too large to upload onto the Newnham page)**