

Metal and Wood

In December 1978 I went to the United States for a year. I left London with a happy feeling in my heart and a sense of optimism. Up until that point, I had done a certain number of things, but was still feeling dissatisfied by what I had accomplished. Going somewhere else seemed to offer a situation where familiarity, habit and expectation could be left behind, and I could become what I wanted to be. Going was as much leaving as arriving. In the States I would be faced with deciding what to do. For some years previously I'd been reading Rilke, mainly his letters and his essay on Rodin. In New York, and indeed on the plane to New York, I began to read his "Sonnets to Orpheus". I read them time and time again over the next five months. I began to make drawings, and at some point it became apparent that what I was drawing had a very distinct relationship to what I was reading. But elucidating exactly what that relationship was is more difficult.

The first thing that attracted me to the Sonnets, I remember, was the way in which Rilke wrote of speech and, particularly, of song and of praise. Song and praise here are *US* and, at the same time, that which shapes the world:

Sonnets to Orpheus, 1st part # 3

"Song is existence. For the god unstrained
But when shall we exist?..."

The elements of the Orphic myth - the singer whose song could charm the beasts and cause the rocks and the trees to move; who drew Eurydice back from the dead and whose body was torn apart and scattered by the Maenads, his head floating off still singing - provide a peg on which these reciprocating ideas can be hung.

Sonnets to Orpheus, 1st part # 5

"Raise no commemorating stone. The roses
shall blossom every summer for his sake.
For this is Orpheus. His metamorphosis
in this one and in that. We should not make
searches for other names. Once and for all,
it's Orpheus when there's song. He comes and goes.
Is it not much if sometimes, by some small
number of days, he shall outlive the rose."

To sing or to praise not only describes the world but brings it into being - as if to say the right name by some resonance shapes the stuff of the world into this or that thing- or at least allows the particular thing to be distinguished. If this is so, then language -the place where speaking occurs- is itself our world. At the same time, there is no speaking without listening, hearing is a part of singing. We are both listeners and speakers: We are of and in language.

Sonnets to Orpheus, 1st part # 26

"Though they destroyed you at last and revenge had its will,
sound of you lingered in lions and rocks you were first to
enthrall, in the trees and birds. You are singing there still.
O you god that has vanished! You infinite track!
Only because dismembering hatred dispersed you
are we hearers today and a mouth which else Nature would lack."

Reciprocity and reflexivity are at the heart of the drawings, which are by no means literal representations of aspects of the poems. The entire suite is collectively titled "It's Orpheus when there's singing". All the drawings have an enclosure, an enclosing line, with, at some point, an aperture circumscribed by the enclosure. The aperture and the whole enclosure can be thought of as the head of Orpheus. In the world there are a large number of items you come across frequently — shoes, hats, pots, pans, cups, jugs, shells, bags, pockets, gloves, etc.- which have a similar form — an enclosure with a small opening. Rather than being straightforward images of a head, the drawings referred to other things, sometimes very obviously. There are also the questions of what an enclosure is, and what an opening is. An enclosure is a formation, a clarification, actuality; an opening is a possibility. Singing and listening are reciprocal activities. Mouths and ears are openings in the head. Both seem to imply resonance: sound comes out of and goes into hollowness. The dog on the His Masters Voice-recording label can listen *and* bark. There was no object being drawn, so in order to get to a point where I could draw what I wanted, it seemed necessary to have rules. These were a means of avoiding some decisions about the appearance of the drawing as it developed. These drawings were constructed using a string, a pin and a pencil - this was the rule. All the curves were then built up from arcs or segments of circles of varying radii. This construction created a very fine mesh of marks, from which a final form slowly emerged, almost as if it had been captured. While the first drawings were concerned with a parallel between an enclosure and a human head, the later ones were concerned with aspects of picturing, recognition and

identification implicit in the line being constructed. I think that a part of the fruitfulness of these drawings in respect of other work has to do with their method of being built: they are not pictures or plans, but rather constitute something like a grammar. Somehow, they were "in anticipation". Since speech is constitutive of ourselves as human, to speak is both to cause the world to be and to be oneself. At the same time, speech is not a thing, but rather is a product of community, built bit by bit in discourse. Speech is not nature, like stone or rock; it is manufactured. To make is also to bring into being, to cause there to be something.

When I returned to England, I had these drawings in mind as being potentially important for the sculpture that I might make. Of course, making a drawing is different from making a sculpture. The drawings seemed to show that what was enclosed had a relationship to the contour. This functioned like a skin over the interior, and the interior remained a hollow resonant space. But both "skin" and "interior" remain separate and mute, though the elements of language, appearance, community, building, speaking, listening, production and manufacture are all involved.

Sonnets to Orpheus, 1st part # 4

"A tree ascending there. O pure transcension!
O Orpheus sings! O tall tree in the ear!
All else is suspended, yet in that suspension
what new beginning, beckoning, change, appear!

Creatures of silence pressing through the clear
disintricated wood from lair and nest;
and neither cunning, it grew manifest,
had made them breathe so quietly, nor fear,

but only hearing. Roar, cry, bell they found
within their hearts too small. And where before
less than a hut had harboured what came thronging,

a refuge tunnelled out of dimmest longing
with lowly entrance through a quivering door,
you build temples in their sense of sound."

It's as if there is a gap between intention and action, as if each time I commence, the clarity of the intention evaporates, and I am left doodling and

scratching around. I have been trying to make a book which I want to call *Gondwanoland*, and which tries to parallel or model or represent what I find compelling in that paleogeological concept. The existence of these places (the primal continents) is a deduction and extrapolation backwards from the facts, from the evidence in the here and now. We are accustomed to the idea that the conditions of life have changed, both materially and biologically, and even that the contours of the earth alter - mountains rise and fall, deserts move. But the notion that it could be a *different* place, that instead of Europe, America, Africa, Asia it was somewhere else, is both fantastic and compelling. As a boy, always aware both of the possibility of imminent cataclysmic disaster and of the desire to leave home, I used to keep a small case ready at hand under the bed. Among the things it contained - false documents, money, food, whistle, knife, string, etc. - was a map. It was a map I had drawn. The map had no relation to where I was. Evidently, I knew where I was, but would be going somewhere else, to a place I did not know. In such a place a map is useful. The map as I remember had a shape -as if it were the map of an island- with a few notional features. Shape is the outside edge boundary, extremity, limit. It is other. By contrast, a street plan has no shape separate from the sheet on which it is printed. There is an implied continuity between the map and the place in which one stands. Somehow, therefore, in order for my map to represent another place in the intended sense, there was a necessity for it to have a shape or boundary. The contour of the interior, however, is always more difficult.

Most metals shine -they reflect light - respond to looking. They look back. Such resistance is rare. Sight is a peculiarly grasping sense. One's eyes lay hold of the world and subjugate or order it according to the needs of the moment. Eyes and the "I" form a strong bond. "If looks could kill"... The ways in which we look at the world are reflected in the ideas we have about it. The kind of world we see is a consequence of our notions. Some years ago, in late April, I visited the Lake District, driving up from London. It's a long drive, at the end of which hills rise up in front of you like a great block. As the road narrowed and began to pass through small towns and villages around the lakes, I gradually became aware that there were enormous numbers of daffodils planted on the roadside verges, roundabouts, and every little packet of ground. Spring was late that year, and most were in flower. "Civic pride," I thought, "something for the tourists." And then, "Wordsworth!" What a thing! A poem has so captured imagination that its scenario is endlessly repeated. "Pretty as a picture," one might say. The landscapes of Claude Lorrain have a similar relation to the 18th-century landscape garden. Digging

through the documents of the late 18th century, one realizes that a very important change has taken place. Nature has changed and become image, representation or expression.