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MATTER IN MIND

Published in The Financial Times, 3 - 4 October 2015

In 2006, walking in the southern valley of Hoy, in the Scottish Orkney islands, between 480ft high cliffs to the south and sizeable hills to the north, I came upon a grassy, open valley that leads to the clifftop village where the composer Sir Peter Maxwell Davies used to live. On the way a vast stone blocks the path, a glacial erratic that seems to have moved from the stone cliffs nearby. Carved into it is a low, cupboard-like hole. You crawl inside and can lie with your knees up in one of the two chambers either side of a central passage. Both are just big enough to accommodate a body. One of the cot-like spaces even has a stone pillow.

This is known as the Dwarfie Stane, but it feels like a spaceship crossed with a meteorite, crossed with a nursery room bunk bed.

The experience of the Stane and the knowledge of it change your attitude to the place. Suddenly, it has history and is inscribed with human purpose. In making an undifferentiated lump of rock a place for burial and the final journey of the spirit, it makes the valley and the island particular. Here is a launch site for Virilio's strapped astronaut with minimum movement for maximum velocity or C.S. Lewis's Ransom who flies into stellar space in a coffin in *Out of the Silent Planet*.

This solid memory from the early farmers of the Neolithic, a chamber cut by nothing more than human effort pounding stones is, for me, a great sculpture. It shares with my work a concern with making a human space in space and suggests that all material things are mutable, possessable by mind as well as body, and transformative.

Sculpture can transform a site into a place through an act of will. Sculpture is our dialogue with the earth, whether formed by the early farmers carving the Stane, by Richard Long making a line of stones in the Himalayas, or by the prehistoric draughtsmen of the chalk horse at Uffington. Our need is to leave a trace: a trace of our living and dying on the face of an indifferent universe. Sculpture's central purpose in confronting the materiality of the body with another materiality is to engage the imagination, to make links with all that lies beyond the palpable and the observable, deep in space or deep in the unconscious mind.

In a time when art has become commodified and institutionalised and where we go to museums to experience "Art", I believe in the ability of sculpture as a first-hand experience to move us and shift our goal-orientated consciousness somewhere deeper and wider.

Art has always been for all, in Gilbert & George's words. The making of art is an act of hope and sculpture in particular a talisman for continuance. I like to think about the idea that there will be some people, some intelligence in the future that will connect with these gestures of human manufacture and understand that they do not fulfil the desire for comfort but the need of the imagination to have both catalyst and testimony. Art is what we do to express life beyond life. The objects' existence in time becomes part of our lives, even if their meaning is not clear to us or their story obscure, they become part of our story, a tribute to the need for mystery in the heart of the known.

Every object tells stories: the story of its making, whether human, geological or natural; the story that it illustrates; the story that the artist attaches to it and the story we attach to it - the thing that makes us look. Artists have played with the three levels of ekphrasis (none more than Duchamp). What is the reason that a dumb thing, an object in the world that is not furniture, that isn't a tree, mountain or house, calls on our interest? What is the difference between a story that is applied to an object and the integration of a story within the object, or the invitation for an observer to read his or her own story into the object? Bishop Berkeley stated that "in all the choir of heaven and furniture of the earth - in a word all those bodies which compose the frame of the world - have not any substance without a mind". Well, I think of sculpture as a piece of furniture that invites a particular adaptation of mind. The art of our time is now free, open, an exchange that is not for profit or status, but for the regeneration of life itself.

We think of art as precious, expensive, being own-able. But I think of art as of enormous worth, to be owned in a very different way to a gold watch or smart car: its value lies in its ability to stimulate thoughts that were lost or thoughts that would otherwise not exist at all. A good work of art can stimulate feelings that were unknown to us until the work was there to render them available. . In a time when even the directors of our museums have to go to art fairs all around the world - in other words, at a time of the rise of the exchange value of art - it is worth remembering that art is made to be shared and in its sharing, make life richer.

So, art is the way that human life expresses itself. Objects can transmit what cannot be transmitted in words. Art, like music, can move us in ways that we cannot fully articulate or understand but in being moved, we are transformed and in being transformed, our feeling of being in the world and our feelings about the world are transformed. In 1977, Walter De Maria filled an entire first floor apartment on Wooster Street with deep earth for his work *The New York Earth Room*. Standing at the blocked threshold of the apartment and feeling the humidity of the earth on my skin changed me and my view of what was possible. If art has this power to change the feelings of a single person, it has the power to change the world for all of us.

There are many myths surrounding public art but for me art was always made to be shared. Art is the vehicle in which individual experience becomes collective. All art demands to be seen and in the process of being seen demands a process of collaboration from the observer. Recently, Tino Sehgal has used the conversational as well as the shared spaces and rhythms of collective life as raw material, but in my view all art of all time aspires to a condition that feeds into the common creativity of humankind.

I believe that we feel most alive when plunging into the sea or standing in the wind at the top of a mountain. But what makes us human is our ability to communicate those intense moments of aliveness to others, in the stories we share of our individual adventures. The art of conversation is the way in which each of us makes sense of our lives by recounting stories, or personal responses to our encounters with things, people, places, feelings and smells, to another. This is where value arises: in giving form to something that has happened to us, making it our own and offering it to another.

This is a creative act existing in exactly the same economy as that of art. Art is central to human experience. My feeling is that Joseph Beuys was right, that all human beings are creative beings, that we are all artists, that we are all capable of empathy, putting ourselves as listeners in the shoes of someone else's experience, widening our world through the experience of another.

However, I still believe that sculpture, of its essence, is the most provocative and challenging of all the arts. It is still and silent. It makes an object that displaces space and makes a materialised proposition: an object that sits in the world and says, "Can we try to look at things this way?" If it works it does not need a label or a text. Its silence and stillness invites us to stop. When we ask it "What is this thing is doing here?", it returns the question to us and asks the same, "Well what are you doing here?" The fact that sculpture can exist without walls, without climate control, without roofs, without the shelter of an intellectual argument or institutional protection allows sculpture itself to return to the realm of shared conversation.

Ever since Walter De Maria's Mile Long Drawing, Robert Smithson's Spiral Jetty, Richard Serra's prop pieces and Michael Heizer's Double Negative in America in the late 1960s, sculpture's role has been to give us instruments with which we can think about our own experience, our context and the world around us. This is a new role for a very old art form that nevertheless, in its materials and languages, speaks in mineral planetary terms that counter the jeopardy of mortal human biological life. Sculpture, in re-affirming the substantial and not being content to be a picture of things, contradicts the way that, in the developed world, all experience is so swiftly turned into image and symbol.

Sculpture, in its absolute materiality, can reinforce in us the primacy of firsthand experience, reuniting the palpable, the perceivable and the imaginable. When so many of us are immersed in a world of meetings, deadlines, duty and work, sculpture - by being a rock in the stream of our lives - invites us to stop, reconsider, to re-assess being rather than doing. It returns us to the top of the mountain, to the feeling of the wind on our cheeks, to the shock of ice cold water.
