

Richard Deacon and Lewis Biggs in conversation 16.11.98

LB I wanted to start, Richard, by asking you about your forthcoming show at TGL for which you have found the title New World Order and I was hoping you could give us some of your reasons for deciding on that title.

RD OK. There seem to be a raft of reasons. In the past few years when I have been making work, I have tended to think of it as being neither abstract nor representational, but somehow showing a different sort of world, that the things that I make, in the past I have tended to emphasis metaphoric qualities in the work, which I think are still there, but I've...

LB Literal qualities have always been as important as the metaphoric qualities.

RD Do you mean the literary qualities or the literal?

LB Literal.

RD The literal qualities have always been as important as the metaphoric, but without wanting to sound too x-files or too Alien Resurrection or whatever, the kind of condition that I would like the work to have is that they are objects but they're and in that sense they have a world associated with them but it is as if I was making a landscape it's not that I'm making a representation of an existing landscape as much as making a new landscape. It's also not to do with fantasy. So one title might have been Another World Order .

LB What do you mean by fantasy there? Fantasy is unreal whereas what you make is real?

RD (Laughs) I suppose I am saying that, yes. I didn't want to associate what I am saying too closely with symbolism, for example, that's fin de siecle symbolism,..... fantasy is not a bad word.

LB It could be fiction but not fantasy?

RD No, you see they are fiction.

LB Have we talked before about Poppers' World Three? He posits that there is the world of real things, and the world of subjectivities, and between the two there is a world of ideas, a world of books, as it were, which operates on the real world but is not the same thing as the real world, neither is the same thing as subjectivities...

RD No, I don't know that, but it sounds as if it might be interesting to look at, not a million miles from ... There is a certain amount of forward looking Utopianism, or imagined others, which are implicit in the work.

The second reason would be that the phrase New World Order is definitely associated with George Bush and the Gulf War, and there is a synchronicity of time when the phrase was first introduced and the dating of the works in the show. It's quite interesting in that language comes to be like an object or to describe a condition ..

A phrase like 'new world order' comes to operate like a nugget of language which contains an ideology, which circumscribes a world view, and I have often used language in the work as a means of trying to point to the ways in which the ways we talk about the world, the ways we think about the world, are not entirely disassociated from the way that the world looks, so that somehow there is a certain symbiosis between the two. And 'New World Order' as a phrase seems to belong to that kind of category become object circumscribing a world view, and there is an attempt in the title to take hold of that object, and to, if not directly question it, at least to address the intellectual processes involved in forming a world view . So there is it has a sharpness but in other ways it is meaningless phrase, and I think it is interesting how a meaningless phrase becomes almost like a weapon.

LB Coming as it did two years after the Berlin Wall came down, it seems like the re-imposition of an old order on what was threatening to become a free situation.

RD Yes.

LB My son is almost ten, and your son was ten at the time, and the range of awareness of a child of ten or eleven is suddenly much greater, they begin looking towards the world and contemporary history in a way in which they never have done. You were presumably having to interpret the world to your son increasingly at that time, do you think that may also have had an effect on the way in which you worked.

RD It's possible. Actually, I can't answer that but it's possible. I don't know how disturbed he was by the Gulf War or how real it was for him.

(stalls)

RD What I wanted to do with the title was to use the title as a way of implying that the work addressed a reality, and at the same time to appropriate a piece of language and re-direct it into another use, so into that another place, or borrow it. It's a funny thing the way that bits of language come into the public domain and function.

LB The context of this particular piece of language is that order is being re-imposed on a position of freedom or change or ...

RD Yes, exactly, but that's assuming that order is re-imposed rather than that there is always order.

LB In the past you have used titles to talk about the relationship between art and its audience. And although 'New World Order' has a prime facie political context, and world events, I assume you are using it also, that you are appropriating it in order to discuss an aspect of the relationship between art and its audience. Not that one has priority over the other., they are running together.

RD Well, yes, inevitably That's an aspect. The intention behind the exhibition is not to do a survey of a continuing story ... it's not really a follow up to a continuing sequence of shows, its not What I need this show to do, what I want it to do, the audience is more or less familiar with things I have done in the past, but it shouldn't be seen as continuity...

LB It could even be a complete re-positioning of the work...

RD Yes it could be. Therefore the title of the exhibition has a job to do. The job is to initiate the process of re-positioning. The aspects of the work that I think are in flux, or fresh, or ... The use of a slightly polemical title, certainly a title that belongs very much to a domain external to art is a way of beginning that process .. so that's a polemical use ... But I also think that the lexical meanings of the words in the phrase are pertinent to the ways in which I have thought about making work and the kinds of relationships to bodies of knowledge, as well as to material processes, that have been occupying me for the past few years...

LB As you say, it's a Utopian kind of phrase...

RD A Utopian phrase that has been muddled by reality....

LB And the tradition of Utopias has been used very often for a satirical or ironic purpose ...

RD You might say it's a dystopian phrase....

LB Many people have picked up on the ironic aspect to your work, is one intention of the title to foreground that sense of irony or satire...

RD Actually it wasn't.... I have a certain anger about the claim for new world order that was not MY world order. And it might quite simply reflect a need to irritate ...

LB An angry inversion Irony and satire denote distance, to some extent, don't they, and you are too involved with it to wish to distance yourself in that way.

RD Yes, I'm not constructing a satire, I'm trying to reclaim a world view... but to do so in the presence of reality and not sealed off from reality.

LB So it's not a proposition, not a proposal for an alternative view,

RD Although there are alternative views...!

LB ... it's in fact a claim that reality belongs in your camp....

RD No, well to some extent. But it's not a universalising claim..... I'd make it less personalised than that and say that....

LB It's not about you, it's about the work

RD Yes, that's a simple way of putting it. And that the work itself is capable of multiple propositions...

LB Yes, because playfulness is always in the work. There is a sense of play, if not playfulness, but play is a central notion in the work but play inevitably produces new solutions all the time, it's about shuffling the cards all the time and producing something new.... But that doesn't sit very easily with the anger, which is more direct, (silence) I didn't want to get you in the psychiatrist's chair...

RD There is a Freud quote from Beyond the Pleasure Principle, when Freud describes imitative play as a means of mastering the environment. When I was thinking about the constellation of realism, mimesis, representation So, yes, play does present new solutions, but it is also a way of describing the world.

LB Or of calling the world into being....

RD Yes, and of transforming the world, in that you make things stand for other things

LB ... and you can resolve things in play in order to resolve them in the world...

RD Yes, and what happens to the material object in that play situation is that it loses some of its objectivity and becomes a kind of intermediary. It comes to signify, but it doesn't disappear, it stays a material object. So it seems to me that the reasons for calling the show New World Order, are -yes, there's a kind of anger involved, but it's not interesting if it's just an act of anger. I do have a sense of the ways in which I have been making work in the last nine or ten years has some world-building, or world- imagining, intentions, while at the same time trying to retain a kind of openness so that it's not circumscribing so much as trying to make openings. But world is an important component in being the place in which these things happen: it doesn't happen in the imagination, it happens in a grounded environment. 'Order' refers to systems of classification, or sequences on lists, as well as to hierarchies of domination, and at the same time the phrase itself has its kind of object-like quality to it, so that there's more openness than anger in choosing that.

LB In point of fact, the more I look at the work the less I can see any kind of break in it - there isn't anything which doesn't have a precedent, it just looks as though you are working through a variety of paths that you first opened for yourself ten years before that... I'm not saying there's nothing new, just nothing wholly unexpected ... there's nothing inconsistent with what had gone before...

RD Well I don't mind consistency, I think that's alright.... If there was nothing new, I think I would be suspicious... .if the work seemed over familiar

LB There are changes in emphasis, but let's come back to talk about that later. Perhaps we could talk more specifically about what's in the show and why... moving on from the title.

RD OK... The structure of the show starts with an empty room, with the screened windows, and the interest in using those is that they provide a location for the work, so that the work is either inside the room, outside the room or on the windows... provides a kind of model 'environment' of some sort... The use of that Because it's not just the drawings, its also the screens and the aluminium frames... that acts as a key or a coda for the other elements within the exhibition.

As you go into that space, to the left are the smaller works across the floor, which are materially, structurally and formally very diverse, and which you perambulate around. To the right of those is a group of much more bulky objects, which block the way, but all of which are enclosed ...

LB By which you mean volumetric ?

RD And hermetic... except one which leans against the wall. And then, in the other gallery which has a higher ceiling, there is a sequence of three large wooden structures all of which use the same making procedure, but which are very different one from the other, but their material structure and their volume are wrapped together so that the, in three different ways, but the volume, the space and the volume the work occupies are both empty and full at the same time so that the wood is, and this is particularly true of Laocoon ,... that the material is present throughout the object, which occupies the space but at the same time is also a hollowness, which also occupies the space. Whereas in the first galleries both the smaller and the bigger works are material skins,

LB ... in the higher gallery the larger works have space interpenetrating freely...

RD ... and obviously that small-medium-big transition is not an unfamiliar one from other things I have done, and the way in which the spectator addresses themselves to those three positions has continuity with other works... Where I think the kind of form-making that I have used has produced less determined shapes, volumes, so that they are materially very specific and formally quite complex, but the things which they resemble, the things which they refer to, or look like, is much less clear, so that hopefully they have this kind of high clarity as made objects. ...

LB And the analogies are reduced...

RD There are some analogies, but the analogies are reduced. While at the same time retaining a kind of openness that idea refers back to the empty room, or the chamber at the beginning, in that those two conditions for the form and a material presence are pushed together. In the window drawings, they are all present in the same surface but they are not mixed, so it's a drawn shape on a plastic window within a frame. So that the three dimensional works in some ways actualise those two.... It's not that those are drawings for objects, but that the specificity of material and a certain kind of openness of form..... I can say it more simply ... when I first installed those works in Krakow I thought they were sculptures which had been fragmented into component parts and yet the component parts were still present in the same place, and the subsequent works are like re-assemblies of those components. That's why those works are at the beginning of the exhibition, because they There are other things which I think are of interest in this in-between state which they have: the transparency, the ways in which they are to be both looked through and at, at the same time, which obviously they describe more programmatically than the sculptures do, although that is also an aspect of what the sculptures do.

LB Yes, I'd like to come back to the notion of transparency ...but what about the relation of sculpture to Landscape, and there is also the idea that all assembled sculpture relates to Still Life ...

RD Is that a question or an assertion?

LB It's an assertion! Landscape is something which you have addressed in the Poussin sculptures, but perhaps the fact that the Poussin was a Landscape is incidental. It seems to me that those kind of links are too reductive, too already colonised by other forms of art, to be very rewarding for you to deal with... and maybe the Poussin sculpture is not about landscape.... OK, this is a more general question about flatness, flatness to the floor or flatness to the wall, is on the whole a non-sculptural idea., you've been trying to make use of flatness to say things within the broad remit of your work -why that flatness, as in the Back of My Hand ?

SIDE TWO

LB The link for me with landscape is that those genres are essentially dealt with in two dimensions, inviting people to enter into a world of two dimensions and to supply their own third dimension. Anything which is flat to the floor, or to the wall, will invite us to treat it as a two dimensional representation into which we will read our own third dimension. But that seems to me to be a different way of operating to supply an object in the round which you may then look over or through or past but its slightly different way of interacting with the work.

RD In a way you have answered your own question, because the question was slightly why flatness? because flatness implies a concern for depth, a representation of the illusion of depth, whereas three-dimensionality, in-the-roundness. One of the things that in-the-roundness does is that it allows you to assert your identity...

LB ...presence?...

RD ...your presence.. .. so that when you see an object you are also implicitly understanding yourself as not being the object. One of the problems with seeing depth in human perception is to do with the fact that it also implicitly demolishes presence, because there is no object. And the flat works are attempts to try and position (I am trying not to be too formal about it because it does touch on questions of identity and the self and experience) because the late works are objects which are not-in-the-round, and therefore, I think what I am looking for is a disembodied object which somehow ...

LB Playing with the idea of being an object or not being an object...

RD Yes, I assume in some ways that Richter's mirrors have the same intention in some sort.... And they do have a border, a boundary, and so they are objects in that they are bounded, but at the same time within the boundary, the answer is: it is to do with making a flat depth. They are not about flatness, they are about depth...

LB Setting the challenge of finding depth within the flatness

RD But not in a formal or perspectival way, and to do with the relationship between the experience of the self in relationship to other in relationship to the object, and the ambiguities of otherness which arise when the object is an object, but not in-the-round.... So to put it simply, I suppose, you could say I was trying to position the object more firmly within the subjective than as an object, but without overwhelming, or engulfing, or surrounding the viewer ... which is obviously some of the ways in which you can de-materialise, or de-objectivise the object is to encompass the viewer....

LB Last question on the show The specifically industrial feel of the gallery overlooking the Dock in Liverpool has a definite presence

RD It has a heavy ceiling

LB But also the wrought iron structure has a loaded connotation if you like - you can't help reading it as industrial - is that a concern for you, that the sculptures exhibited in that space will be ...

RD ... subject to Loading!

LB... to that kind of loading , yes!

RD Yes, well, I think that was a good reason for putting the frames within that space. Yes it might be problematic, if it was the whole space filled with objects of a particular scale they would look like goods, particularly under the weight of that quite low ceiling. And again, in opposition to the galleries overlooking the river, well I think there is an interesting inversion, because although the more massive works are on the river side, they will probably look lighter, and that's not only a feature of their transparency, its also a feature of the room, and it's right that they should be more airy, because they are more in the air...

LB They need a neutral space to float, don't they, which is what they do

RD Yes

LB ... those pieces (on the River side) especially have retained the very attractive, literally attractive, quality of many of your earlier works, in that they invite touch, they invite close inspection, the intricacy and detail invite you to enter into close contact with them, they are warm in that sense, and they invite intimacy despite their scale, but in the galleries on the other side (over the dock) there will be quite a number of works which are much less attractive, even slightly repellent in their surface, I mean literally repellent in the sense of shininess, or the reflective surface of plastic or glass. They do not invite, some do not invite the same kind ...

RD they are more hermetic

LB Although some of the transparent and semi-transparent ones invite engagement of a different kind, in that they are more scopic and less tactile, in terms of inviting one to look through and approach and engage with them, but those latter ones which we're talking about were not features of your work before the late 80s

RDNo

LB So that is one kind of a change of direction which could be isolated and talked about. A corrugated iron work like 'If The Shoe Fits' is not particularly tactile, well it has a tactile quality but it is not a particularly sympathetic material to caress, and even linoleum has a kind of warm tactility.

RD Yes, to some extent. Well, first, those works tend to be structured in a different kind of a way, their particulate nature is more evident and so therefore their assembly and the rhetoric of all the detail of the assembly is part and parcel of what you see. Funnily enough, I think that the wooden works are more mechanical than the works you have been describing. And although I do think that the sculptures to be shown in the gallery on the dock side in Liverpool do have that kind of hermeticism, the way I would describe it is that they have a greater plasticity, and that in some senses hollowness has been a significant feature of what I have made, so that enclosing a shape completely and not allowing any entry point was at one point a crucial issue. Towards the end of the 80s, I began to find other ways around that...

LB As in Struck Dumb?

RD ... partly formal resolutions, and partly dissatisfactions with the necessary consequences of bending and folding, the kind of form making that allows you to do, and searching for a more fluid form Without wanting to make a solid...

LB At the end of the 1980s you made a large number of sculptures for placement out of doors. Did this have an effect on the way in which your work as a whole developed.

RD The first work I made especially to go outdoors was in Liverpool, for the Garden Festival in 1984, although it was only a temporary work. But it is true that there was a rush of work of this kind for me at the end of the 80s. It made me think a lot about the notion of the 'public', and it made me there

seemed to be good reasons for doing that,... in part there was a certain amount of anger involved as well, not so much in the beginning but there was a kind of polemic against the use against the appropriation of public space, I wrote a piece with Lynne Cooke at the beginning of the 90s, and it was just after the Berlin Wall had come down and there were all those photographs of toppled monuments and I imagined, if the situation had been reversed, what would have been the monuments which would have been destroyed, wondering what the relationship was between the monument and the public place. And the ways in which sculpture was often seen as a decorative element within the public place and trying to assert that to the contrary it was a kind of guarantee of publicness, because of the kind of thing the sculpture was. It had meanings in public, not in the sense of social engineering but in the proper political sense. And at the same time, I had wanted the work not to be governed by ... Let's be arrogant, I thought sculpture came first, I thought that it preceded the Gallery, it preceded the Museum, that in some ways what was happening was that within the context of the Museum it was to allow a particular thing to be, whereas the Museum was there because those things were there, but at the same time the constraints whether of the Museum or the Gallery were inhibiting the capacity of the public to engage with sculpture publicly.. And so the rush of the work in the late eighties and early nineties was in part a consequence of opportunity, but also in part a consequence of what was in the air...

LB So in contrast to the studio work, whose destination you can't control, it may go to a museum, it may go to a private house, but you have very little control over where it ends up, and to that extent no control over its meanings....

RD Well, in some works I have looked for that, 'Art for Other People' was deliberately intended to be autonomous where-ever it was, or intimate wherever it was...

LB On the other hand, public sculpture because it is fixed by its nature to a specific site, offers a whole new range of possibilities for engaging with meaning... and did you experience this as a liberation.

RD Yes, although I now find (I don't know whether this needs to go in or not) I get a lot of invitations to make proposals from people who know what they want and imagine that I will give it to them.

LB So the constraints which go along with the opportunities are balanced ...

RD At the moment I am really refusing mostly to because my own interests have moved in different directions ... the most difficult things for me to make have always been to make a fairly conventionally sized sculpture and actually I have found that my interest is coming to thinking that that's what I want to make I don't want to make very large sculptures....A year ago I was thinking I want to make very tiny things, but actually now the most fruitful area, and also the most difficult one for me, is to make middle sized, sculpture sized sculptures, it's always been the most difficult area, in the early 80s I deliberately rejected that as a size because it seemed to bring too much with it in terms of history, context or whatever, I actually now think it is the most open area ..

LB In terms of complexity and therefore opportunities for engaging with something.

RD ... and also the most evacuated area, no-one is trying to deal with it. So on the one hand it seems I have a certain kind of fluidity or comfort in making quite large objects, but the thing that I'm really quite interested in making now is relatively modest scale objects in a that seems to me the most I am beginning to get very suspicious of installation, of site specificity, in all of those seemingly liberating notions about practice...

LB because in fact they are insufficiently generalisable

RD in part, and because they have become short hand

LB For putting more into the work?

RD yes, and also for not really ... because they are so dependent. Yes, in the mid 80s early 90s I think the public place was very liberating for me, gave me confidence, at the moment it seems to be an overly complex way of making work to me, there's too many negotiations, you have to go with. I'm not antagonistic to the ideology of it, as a means of expression or whatever, but the critical engagement with it has somehow shifted away from the art and into the 'field'.

LB That's very interesting, because, up until 10 years ago the range of analogy which was brought to bear on your work was basically from the language of the body, most particularly the organs of sense, ears, eyes and so on, and internal organs, and domestic instruments - the pots and pans - but in the last 10 years you have been moving away from that range of interests, but now you are saying that actually it's the body that interests you, sorry, it's not the body but the object over against the presence of the body which interests you... because inevitably anything of that kind of mid scale relates primarily to the body, or has the presence of the body or engages the presence of the body, so is it in any sense a move back to where you were? I want to try to come back and characterise what you have been doing over the past 10 years...

RD Well, I didn't think it was, no ... And I'm not even sure that your assertion is correct... I think there is a size that is smaller than the body and which doesn't refer to the body.. But which is ...

LB Beauty and the Beast? That scale?

RD Yes, actually it was the show I made in Japan, earlier this year, one Beauty and the Beast. A surprising consequence of doing this show was the recognition that there were ...

LB That there were possibilities for mid-sized sculpture which you had not engaged with previously...

RD A part of the difficulty that I might well have had in the past, was that when you get to a mid-sized sculpture that you always see a body there, but actually when it came to the work in the show in Japan I thought that maybe there doesn't have to be ... I find that very exciting as a possibility... in that sense it doesn't seem to me to be stepping backwards...

LB So what it seems to me is that 10 years ago you seemed to be following different strands in the works but separating them out so there didn't seem to be any unified And one of the fields you appeared to be exploring appeared to be about subjectivity and the other, which is perhaps most manifest in the inside outside, but another thing which seems evident to me and I think we've talked about this before, was the idea that you were moving more towards an exploration of structure in a very holistic sense, looking at the world of objects from a structural point of view. What is it all made of? And the works which seem most evidently to be addressing this are B and the B with the folded cardboard, or Laocoon, what could make me feel this way A in which the feel of the sculptures is that they are something microscopic which has been blown up, or that they are analogous for the energy which is the structure of the microscopic world - and of the macroscopic world as well, of course, but we tend to think of it in the microscopic context - so as opposed to domestic instruments or bodies, or sense analogies, the analogies which these works appear to conjure are analogies to do with energy and energy paths which produce structures....

RD Which are then materialised

LB Yes, visualised, made objects....

RD We can go right back to the beginning and say that structure is undoubtedly a part of the new world order, and that if you can bring structure into the frame as a carrier or a component in the search for meaning if you can bring make structure an issue then you do also initiate an engagement with how the word is or how in the past I think I have used structure as assembly, I have often talked about structure as a component in the work, whereas the kinds of structural device you are talking about now are more to do with materialisation than to do with assembly

LB Yes, more to do with how to feel the world, or imagine the world, than how to make this into an object. And one of the things which seems crucial to me about this areas of contemporary science is the recognition that there is no significant difference between subject and object, Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle opened science's eyes to the fact that the scientist was always a part of the experiment, and that the observer and the observed are two parts of one process which cannot be divorced from each other.

RD Yes, you could say that, but you could also say but if you looked at the history of science, then you could say that the attempt to either look closer or look further which is one of the characteristics is the whole expertise of rationalism is to do with denying subjectivity, and the more you look outwards the less you look inwards and so there is a big denial built into it.... if you suddenly realise that you are implicated, then looking inwards becomes deeply problematic because you don't have the mechanism to do so.... It's a very hot topic at the moment, the structure of the mind, the structure of the brain, and in some senses it is like turning the microscope around, but you could also say doesn't that repeat the error?

LB The instruments haven't changed...

RD And the observer is still outside of the equation. And attempting to find out what a mind is like by mapping it is in some senses a ludicrous operation. And There is a sense in which some of the sculptures are to do with something like an externalisation, a manifestation, and yes they are structures, but try and ... it's necessary with their material substance, to identify their material substance, but ...

LB Maybe it's more important to talk about individual sculptures, because there's a lot of sculptures over ten years, but if they are manifesting something, externalising something that was internal...What is it that they are manifesting?

RD Well, that's more problematic...!!!

LB I've been describing a feeling I get from them which is about energy...

RD It is more problematic, it could be that they are just about nothing.

LB But that hasn't been the way that you work on the whole.

RD Well, I made some works about the idea of the beautiful, and I have made works about ideas of libertarianism and authoritarianism...'Nothing is Forbidden' and 'Nothing is Allowed' had a sequence of thoughts about the relation between libertarianism and authoritarianism.

SIDE THREE

RD Clearly one of the directions of contemporary science and contemporary cosmologies has been to do with trying to reconcile the relativity of the observer and the observed. I'm not sure that's quite the same as subjectivity and objectivity. In a sense the edifice of knowledge is based in part on the notion of objectivity - that there is a world out there that can be constructed on paper ...

LB The popular body of knowledge, yes, but Popper would say that the body of knowledge is equally balanced between subjective and objective

RD Yes, I must write that down so I can check it out...

LB So we were trying to characterise what analogies could be brought to bear on the work of the last ten years which weren't the body and domestic implement type of analogies which you worked with in the early 80s. Maybe analogy is the wrong tree to be barking up. Maybe the work is less analogous, more something else...

RD Yes, I think that's true but you still have to answer the question as to what the something else is...!

LB More metaphoric, less analogous. Analogy, has simile in it, whereas metaphor allows for the complete disjunction of the object from the original source of energy which suggested the object. Loss of image, loss of concept, more percept concentrated in the objectdealing with more abstract issues produces more abstract sculptures...

RD Well, suppose I would say that the issues are more abstract but the means are more concrete... And that the territory that is played on is between the very specific material means which has ways of describing fluidity, interconnection, structural linkage, interlocking etc etc etc shininess of surface, ambiguity of form, there would be a whole gamut of descriptions of means... so there's material specificity, a multiplicity of means, but which is less overt than before, the material is obviously manipulated, but less overtly than before, less descriptively - that's the word - less descriptively so...and which then leaves you in the funny position where the work is performing negative functions but at the same time being positively present. So that it's not a particular image, its not this its not that, so a certain kind of negativity, negation is used, and also transparency (it plays a part there somewhere) is used as a way of trying to represent a kind of formal subjectivity

LB I was struck by something you are reported as having said at one point - 'the nexus of meaning is itself perhaps illusiary' - because referring to the sculpture as a nexus of meaning seems perfectly sensible and logical thing to do, that's the whole point of the thing, was this a moment of pessimism or depression on your part? (RD laughs) ... saying that perhaps the notion that sculpture can function in this way as a nexus of meaning is illusiary, or was that not what you were saying?

RD No, that was what I was saying, and I think it is possible to doubt.....

LB It's usually at that point that the question of whether its good sculpture gets asked.... If it's good it will operate that way, if it's poor sculpture then it's unlikely to operate that way for very long. Perhaps that's too much a curator's point of view, not an artist's one....

RD Well, it begs the question of what's good or not... I think it's possible for objects to carry meaning, and I don't think it's necessarily the case that they always do...

LB Do you mean the same object, in one context, or with one person looking at it, will carry one set of meanings, and in another situation or with someone else looking at it may mean nothing?

RD Yes, that's true, but it wasn't what I meant. What I meant was that it's also possible that in no situation will it mean anything, that the idea of meaning itself may be an illusiary construct, which isn't a qualitative issue, it's a more fundamental issue.... I think that what we are trying to talk about is whether it's possible for the object to have ideas... as against resemblances, and whether ideas and resemblances are the same thing, so that your notion of metaphor is certainly one way in which objects can have ideas ...I am actually not sure that I am making metaphoric objects ... because I can't set up the poles of the metaphor in relationship to the objects I make

LB So, OK what if I said that your objects were a metaphor for play The process... certainly one thing that Popper would say is that material objects, artefacts carry encoded in the process of their construction, the meanings of the story of their construction. This inescapable set of meanings may be at a very low level not a very high-flying idea. But obviously that's not very satisfying one want to encode a brighter idea than simply the story of the making,.... However if the story of the making is not simply the story of how to turn out a flat floor, but is to do with the notion of play, that's like music... Play is a sacred principle, it's something which is about being creative ...

RD Play is also a way of asserting the plasticity of the world ...

LB Yes, and of creating a world, of creating a new world order .. so that is one metaphor which I would say was visible in the objects you make ...

RD Do you think it's a metaphor or a consequence of ? To say that the object was like play ...

LB Not like play, but play ..the object is play...The other unifying ...

RD I used to say a long time ago, that I made sculpture because it was a way of looking at the world, and sculpture acted as a kind of screen, what I was interested in was that it was an in-between fact, it wasn't me and it wasn't the world, it was between the two of us. The notion of the in-between has sociability built into it, hence the interest in language and also to some extent the interest in public work, that's what struck me about it, I gave a rather stupid version of it just now, but actually its to do with that sociability, and the consequences of that in between us. I still think that's what I do when I make sculpture I use it as an in-between ...

LB What I mentioned much earlier as being a window?

RD Yes, that's why I said I was interested in that... what I think has changed is that a number of the sculptures I made in the 80s used that 'in between' and then themselves constructed a metaphor for the act of perception, the acts of apprehension, through the organs, so there was a complicity between the organ and the experience, in a material form, so that the subject was apprehension and apprehension of the world Progressively, I've become seemingly less interested in that side than in the constitution of a world....

LB The structure of the world?

RD Yes, structure but also constitution I still think that sociability probably still mediates through that 'in-between' notion, between my fingers and sociability

LB The interface between public and private?

RD Yes, it is partly that, because I am not particularly interested in constructing a private world, which it's perfectly possible to do... And actually one of the interesting things about sculpture is that I think it probably doesn't let you construct a private world.... I'm not sure about that, but it's not psychotic or anything like that.... (Both Laugh). In recent interviews I think I have tended to over-emphasise the material...

LB which has to be counter-balanced by an interest in the cerebral, that's what happened ... that whereas in the 80s it was more hand to mouth to ... now it's more brain work...

RD Brain to material

LB So the thinginess of the things has pulled away from us but its counterbalanced by cerebration. I mean all I was talking about, about 'play' earlier, that's not to deny it's also about work...

RD I've got no problem with that It's more play than work... and it's also possible ... And I did used to talk about work , as being an act of work as being willing or willing to cause something to be, whereas in the act of play the will is less determined... play can be quite constructed.... I think will is involved in play.... Maybe it isn't, maybe will is slightly in neutral in play. I used to talk quite a lot about the in relation to the Tate and Three, how will caused something to come into I think that funnily enough the adjective is wrong, I think that actually the work is less will-full although maybe it's actually more wilful...

LB No, I don't thing I'll quote that...!

RD I think that the work is less willed on one level...

LB In the sense of being less predetermined?

RD Yes. It's always intended but not predetermined, not predesigned.

LB To what extent do you change once you've started working.. for instance 'What Could Make Me Feel This Way' ? ... you have to keep going in the same way...

RD I turned it upside down...!

LB OK But that's only a change of one ... it's symmetrical about the axis, it's not a big change....

RD Well, perceptually it was. But, yes, the wooden works are fairly strongly predetermined... there's a slow build up, whereas the large... 'From Tomorrow', 'Second Skin', 'Nothing is Forbidden' have much more inherent flexibility...

LB OK, particularly when you are experimenting with materials and stuff..

RD Yes.

LB No, but there is an interview... this is the interview with Richard Francis for the Tate Gallery... was the discussion around the unconscious ...

RD No, we did that thing called 'Making Sculpture' which was on the lawn at the Tate, it was with Michael Penny, and Michael Penny started with a very large piece of wood, and I started with some sheets of steel stacked up at the back, and I was very interested in the way the more he did the less there was, and the more I did the more there was. And the notion of will in relation to that and the way in which therefore the thing which I made was more willed than the thing which he made was willed, because he seemed to take away something basic, something brutal from the object, and replace it with something else, I had a lot of thoughts about that, and still think about it quite a lot, an interesting exercise.

LB Why is carving less willed than constructing!?

RD Well he started with a massive piece of wood! With an incredibly strong physical presence as an object...

LB So he had to have a huge will to set against...

RD Yes, but something disappeared, which was the object. The object disappeared and was replaced by something else.... There was no object before I started, and there was at the end so I thought I had an object and an image... Whereas Michael

LB Diminished his object....

RD ... took away some sense of identity some presence which was a consequence of this physical mass... By removing the mass you do remove something, you could look at that as a historical question, look at the block and the relationship and why Michelangelo's Slaves are interesting is because they are imprisoned in the ... or in the Rodin, is engaged with that problematic....

LB In those drawings which you and I were looking at together, the extent to which you were making the drawing or taking away, erasing, as it were willing the drawing into being, but it's not absolutely clear where that willing has come from, whether it's come out from the page or whether it's a kind of interplay between your mind and the object. I can't remember to what extent we tied that down to the externalisation of something unconscious or subconscious, and to what extent it was entirely conscious and willed to that extent. But I'm not really talking about that drawing, I am thinking about a principle, a way of working, to do with predetermination

RD One of the problems of predetermination is closure,

LB Lack of play

RD One of the problems of play is meaninglessness, somehow you have to walk between the two..

LB A huge amount of play comes out of the manipulation of the material, rather than out of the mind... and the play is what happens between your mind and the material... as much if not more comes from the material as from your mind... suggested by the material to your mind..

RD Or as a result of previous experience...

LB Familiarity

RD Yes.

LB You were once involved in an architectural project with Richard Rogers ...

RD This was the 85 thing, we made a film, after the Serpentine show, and we made a film about Pierre Charreau's house.... It was the time he was making the Lloyd's Building, and he was describing how he used the Maison de Verre as a model for the building.... And we kind of had a discussion about... I thought it was quite interesting because the architecture itself seemed to be immensely referential. The house was far from being a machine, but had within it all kinds of references to other sorts of structures, so we talked about it in terms of symbolic architecture. For example there are five staircases in the house, each one is built differently... one is like a spiral staircase in a castle, another is like a hanging bridge in the Andes, another is like a drawbridge in a castle..... there seemed to be that amount of fantasy? Practising? in a high modernist icon it seemed to be interesting to find that level of experimentation, well, openness, indeterminacy ... but that was the only project I did with Richard Rogers... I get on quite well with architects...

LB It's just that they have to deal with a far more circumscribed set of problems than the public sculpture has to ... but maybe people's expectations are lower for architecture.

RD Well, one of the differences between architecture and public sculpture is that architecture comes with a brief. One of the problems with public sculpture is when it comes with a brief.... Because artists aren't good at working to briefs...

LB What you want from architecture, that's to say a good building, is that it should fulfil its brief but that it should give you something on top....whereas the artist, all he has to deal with is the bit on top, he doesn't have to deal with the brief....

RD Isn't there a brief? Well, why I quibble is that lack of function, the absence of a brief in the strict sense, is a positive virtue, but it doesn't imply that anything goes. I'm not sure that it does, it has to make sense...

LB This returns us to the question of what is meaningful and where does the meaning reside... in public as opposed to in private, this is not a Freudian exercise