

Small Talk

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Ordinariness (is) the ... ambition I have for the sculpture. Deacon¹. The sculptor speaks. He is a 'fabricator' whose fabrications lie between us in the way that language does, waiting for us to play it as an instrument. 'Talking shop' and 'pillow talk' communicate meaning because the context is given. The use of words in their 'given' meaning affirms the individual's participation in the social situation. Likewise, art in the museum has the context of other art. In engaging with it, we enter into a dialogue between art and its 'given' meanings. 'Small talk', on the other hand, while also signalling participation, is most obviously an instrument for testing out an unfamiliar environment. We use it in any and every situation in order to provide social 'glue', and it is impossible to imagine a society that could function without it. But it is used most typically at the unmapped extremities of social interaction: extreme intimacy and extreme unfamiliarity. At these poles, the meanings of words are least certain: in intimacy because they are merely a conduit for feeling, and in unfamiliarity because we cannot tell what our words will mean to the other person. In these situations we shy away from using words which 'mean' to concentrate on the use of words as gestures and instruments of exploration. 'Small talk' is a contentless vessel carrying an invitation to generate meaning. Its effectiveness relies on our creative performance. "I can recall ... trying to consider ways of working which had some analogy to the ways in which a pianist could work at his or her performance"². J. S. Bach's collection of short works published as *The Well-Tempered Clavier* was intended as both polemical and instructive. It was a call to break from the tradition of 'true' tuning and to adopt the new ('equal temperament') keyboard tuning. The pieces were a brilliant exploration and exposition of the possibilities of that tuning, and an invitation to practise playing. *Art For Other People* is a polemical title. It derives from Richard Deacon's utopianism, in part a legacy of the social ideals of the Arts and Crafts Movement. He has an aversion to art that exists only within the institutional world of art. He would like his fabrications to be not only useful, but performed by 'Other People'. *Art For Other People* is more a series of exercises in the manipulation of materials than of grand statements of meaning. It is in part a manifesto for the expressive possibilities inherent in 'non-noble' materials, and a call for a down-to-earth practice of the craft of those materials. A Utopian refusal to accept the division between utility and aesthetics, between labour and love, work and play. And an invitation to join in and to raid this dictionary of 'small talk'.

¹ Richard Deacon. Whitechapel Art Gallery, London, 1988

² Richard Deacon, *Skulpturen/Sculptures* 1987-1993, Kunstverein Hannover, 1993