

Richard Deacon: Object Lessons

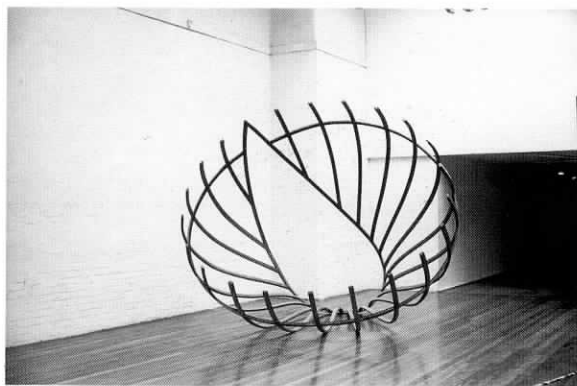
Lynne Cooke

Part 1

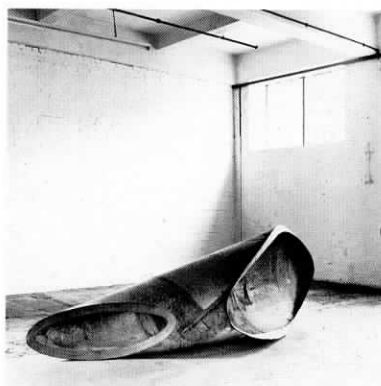
Richard Deacon's **Art For Other People** series of sculptures was initiated in a sudden burst of activity in 1982. Deacon had returned to London in 1980 after a year in the United States during which he concentrated mainly on drawing though he made a number of clay pots as well.¹ Once back in his Brixton studio he set about constructing a large sculpture in laminated wood, the form of which evolved directly out of certain shapes found in his drawings of the previous year. The next sculpture was also closely affiliated except that whereas in the first, volume was articulated by means of a ribbed cage-like structure, in this one, galvanised steel sheet was bent to form a cone, its ends then pared and the contours flanged to stress the transition from inner to outer. Unlike a pot's dark embrasure which remains visually indeterminate, this interior was crisply defined, to the eye as well as to the mind. (Just as the drawing on the exterior of the sheet

helps map the form visually, so the wide angles of the openings at each end flagrantly expose the precise form of the inner volume.) A second linear laminated work then followed. However the next sculpture, Deacon's fourth since his return from America, proved tellingly different. More complex in form, and richer in allusion, it was less immediately comprehensible – in cerebral as well as in physical terms – than any of its predecessors. A vividly idiosyncratic presence, **If The Shoe Fits** (1981) was the first of Deacon's works to receive a name. Baptising it at once acknowledged, and extended, its unprecedented complexities and metaphorical implications, some of which the artist only fully appreciated after completion. From that moment onwards he 'began to make structures which had connotations, [because] the connotations enriched the experience of the work', thus launching what has become the **Art For Other People** series.²

Five sculptures appeared rapidly over the



Untitled, 1980
Laminated wood, 300 x 290 x 290 cms
Saatchi Collection, London



Untitled, 1980
Sheet steel and concrete, 125 x 345 x 125 cms
Private collection

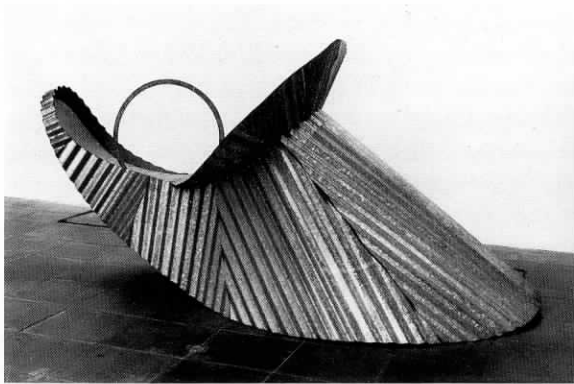
next few months. In **Art For Other People No. 1**, there are, exceptionally, two discrete components, a hewn jug-like form in stone and a soft container from stitched leather. Each in different ways recalls the ceramics of 1979, though each would prove even less serviceable as a vessel. Close affinities link Deacon's three-dimensional vessels with his concurrent drawings whose forms resemble various types of container, such as sacks, pouches and pockets. Whereas the drawings have been frequently exhibited the ceramics have not, nor have they been published.³ Thus although the formative influence of the drawings on Deacon's subsequent sculpture has been much remarked upon, the role played by the ceramics has been overlooked.

It is telling that, in retrospect, Deacon should consider the most interesting of these dozen or so hand-thrown vessels the pot whose elongated body descends from a high shoulder to terminate in a point. Amongst the largest (21 x 21 x 30 cms), it is one of only three which recline on their side instead of standing. This lateral orientation serves both to stress its abstract form, which has been emphasized over its utilitarian potential as a container, and to ensure that each time it is put down it may lie slightly differently, resting on another section of its conical body. With hindsight, Deacon deduced that 'in relation to the pots, function seemed to operate in similar ways to the way in which 'figure' operates in Giacometti, as a thing which coheres the object without being

necessarily overt. It's a centre. In some pots and certain dishes a similar kind of thing seems to occur in relation to function, presentation or containing as a device against which the object is cohered. It's a kind of nexus.'⁴ With its utility in question, and its placement somewhat adventitious, its identity became ambiguous. When held in the vacuum of the mind's eye, in the abstract, so to speak, it could be said to meet a generalised definition of a pot but because it did not behave conventionally, it became, instead, more of an object, something *like* a pot.

While aware of its connection to his ceramics, Deacon was more concerned in **Art For Other People No. 1** with explicating the relationship between the two components than with qualifying the potential utility of the individual elements, a relationship which he later described in the following terms: 'The work that began the series was quite close in intention to the H.M.V. record label, the dog and the record player. In that image it isn't clear whether the dog is listening or whether he is actually speaking, barking, into the loudspeaker horn. It could be either since the horn is an amplifying and a listening instrument. This first work is in two parts, a jug and a sleeve. The open sleeve is as much receiving as offering and the jug is either emptying or filling. The subsequent series has also been based on dual relationships. In the later works this dialogue has taken place within single objects, though there are often two materials.'⁵

Art For Other People No. 2 proved



If The Shoe Fits, 1981

Galvanised, corrugated and sheet steel with rivets and screws,
331 x 152.5 x 152.5 cms, Saatchi Collection, London



Pot, 1979, 21 x 21 x 30 cms

Private collection

crucial in that it established the basis from which henceforth all these works would be conceived; that is, less in terms of surface and profile than as closed volumes, and thus as unified, potentially portable, things. **No. 5**, however, broke the sequence in two vital respects: it was much bigger than its predecessors, and it was made by laminating strips of wood as was Deacon's first large work in 1980. Perceiving at once that it was an anomaly – 'the wrong sort of object' because 'culturally, it had a different feel to it from the others' – on resuming the series the following year Deacon was more confident about the issue of size, and consequently about the question of social significance.⁶

Nonetheless, in many respects this initial foray established the parameters within which all subsequent works in the series have been executed.⁷ From this first group a number of distinguishing characteristics can be elicited, not least Deacon's consciously exploratory attitude. These five sculptures betray a more deliberately open-ended approach than that which lay behind the preceding works when, in general, he knew what kind of object he wanted though he did not know how he was going to arrive at it: 'They seemed to be less determined.' This in turn bore upon his decision to employ a reduced scale. In practice, if not in intention, working small offered a more manageable framework for experimenting and permitted quicker results.

Significant also was the choice of materials. In this group of sculptures Deacon

introduced a number of materials which were not only new to him, but which were relatively unorthodox in sculptural practice at that time and hence not larded with specific historical and aesthetic references; most notable of these were leather, which he sewed, and a strongly patterned linoleum. As with the laminated wood and sheet metal which he had used in the preceding sculptures these materials have a minimal structural strength, being neither amorphous like clay and plaster, nor given entities which merely require some readjustment, which is the case with lumps of wood and stone. Commensurate with his longstanding interest in vessels, Deacon sought with these materials to make skin become conterminous with structure and shape. Similar minimum structural properties have been required of all the materials he has subsequently selected – with two exceptions: like the transitional **No. 1**, **No. 12** also contains a monolithic stone component. If Deacon's preference for fabricating has effectively excluded carving and modelling from his practice, he has at the same time shunned what might be deemed a puritanical purism when manipulating his heterogeneous stuff and come to delight instead in assembling disparate materials into novel combinations: comprised of linoleum, wood and marble, **No. 2** is an early instance of this.

And whereas duality, as he perceives it, may play a seminal role in many of these **Art For Other People** sculptures, even to the extent that a sculpture may contain discrete parts, each work still

clearly coheres as a single entity.⁸ His abiding concern for the unity of the piece means that, when large, his sculptures present themselves as 'things', as contained objects whose detail or parts have been clearly subordinated to the overall form.⁹ That the smaller of his works are the more complex depends largely on the fact that with these the spectator's attention may move from detail or section to the entire object without necessitating any shift in physical viewpoint. In the bigger works, by contrast, focussing on a detail or part requires a proximity which precludes perceiving the whole.¹⁰ Most small-scale modernist sculptures, such as those of Joel Shapiro and Alison Wilding, which use the real space of the gallery as distinct from the virtual space afforded by a plinth or pedestal, enforce a distance from the viewer. In Shapiro's work this results from his establishing a kind of force field around the object; in Wilding's from her introduction of a second component which demarcates a boundary. Forsaking the real as well as the imaginary distance which their works maintain, Deacon's sculptures not only invite an intimate inspection but almost require being handled, an impression greatly enhanced by their seemingly casual, adventitious relationship with the ground. Rarely do they sit four-square as do those of Wilding and Shapiro, whose stability provides an essential factor in their authoritative colonising of the surrounding terrain. And whereas theirs seem to expand from an intensely assertive physical core, so that the immediate ambience is apprehended physically as well as optically, Deacon's works are more introverted, and virtually detached from their spatial matrix.¹¹ As a result, the **Art For Other People** works break down that (implicit) distance between viewer and object integral to most modernist sculptures irrespective of their size.

Their collective title also sets them apart. 'For Other People' suggests that they are intended for individuals: that they are neither something that the artist makes primarily for himself (which is often the case with deliberately experimental work) nor something that he devises for a collective audience or a generality, such as 'the public'. Although the title, especially when read in conjunction with the diminutive proportions, intimates a personal relationship between viewer and object, these works have never intentionally

been addressed to specific individuals.

Deacon describes the nature of the relationship by means of an analogy with a letter: 'When I first began making work in the series I have called **Art For Other People**, I hoped and imagined that the works, in much the same way as letters, would end up in a wide variety of places: grand, domestic, institutional, functional, comfortable, cluttered, sparse etc. The materials from which the works in the series have been made are culled from a similar variety of sources. Again, as with letters, I anticipated that the relationship to the work would be a personal, even an intimate one.'¹² The analogy with a letter operates on another level as well, in that not only is there no particular type of place required for reading letters, but the kind of absorption that results generally renders the reader oblivious to his or her actual location: becoming engrossed in a missal entails becoming (temporarily) indifferent to one's physical situation and the contingent circumstances. Something similar occurs when examining Deacon's objects.

With hindsight, further characteristics peculiar to the group may be discerned. Deacon constantly collects material which he discovers in sundry ways, often serendipitously. This is stored in the studio, sometimes for a matter of years, until he either discerns a role for it in a sculpture, or he decides to discard it in favour of other, more recent finds. Whereas, especially in the case of the latest, very large sculptures, material has usually been purchased in quantity (though not always new, sometimes second-hand), on certain occasions at least, as with **No. 22**, the artist has been able to incorporate material which he has chanced upon, often in relatively limited quantities, material which he might not otherwise have had the opportunity of using.

Deacon tends to begin these **Art For Other People** sculptures at certain types of moments – at points of interruption, of redirection, and of release, such as occur after the exacting business of meeting a demanding exhibition deadline, or after completing the laborious and often monotonous task of gluing or riveting required in the fabrication of many of the large sculptures. Thus they tend to be more various and quirky than many of his monumental pieces. As with most artists whose work evolves in a non-

programmatic fashion from one piece to the next, a sculpture from this series may relate to subsequent larger pieces, though this seldom happens in any straightforward linear fashion. However it has been claimed that the generative role of this series within Deacon's art is in fact far greater than is customary with such a way of working; that they, in effect, provide a kind of seed-bed or grammar of forms from which his other works spring. Yet over and above the significant difference in size there is a more fundamental unlikeness distinguishing them from the rest of Deacon's sculptures: this has to do with their reference.

It is not only on account of their size that these works are apprehended in relation to familiar everyday things, equally crucial is their appearance – the references and metaphors conjured by their imagery as well as by the method of fabrication. Most are hauntingly, if elusively, reminiscent of artefacts, implements and tools; in short, of portable objects of diverse kinds. Various ones have been likened to a dish, an old nautical instrument, protective clothing . . . Since these allusions are never specific, the range they cover cannot be precisely pinpointed. However, it is possible to say that these sculptures are more akin to the products of an industrial society than to those from either a feudal or, conversely, a technological one. The materials as much as the processes employed contribute to this. Sturdy and robust, these objects are 'well-made' from familiar industrial products manipulated by straightforward, relatively simple procedures. Not crafted so much as matter-of-factly fabricated by hand, they refer to making as a skill or professional trade: techniques peculiar to automated, mechanised production have been avoided. As with all Deacon's works, there is no gainsaying their forthright facticity and literalness. And it is this literalness, taken in conjunction with their tendency to dissolve the distance between themselves and the observer, which ensures that size and scale become congruent. The resulting parity between the sculptures and the kinds of objects they evoke is manifest on many levels.

The nature of the allusions particular to the **Art For Other People** sculptures differs significantly from that which informs most of Deacon's larger works where the prevailing



Installation with **Art For Other People No. 4**, 1982
Orchard Gallery, Londonderry, 1983

associations are to the sensory organs and other bodily parts. What the monumental sculptures resemble visually they do not of course resemble in scale. By contrast, in the **Art For Other People** works, as with the pots from 1979, it is firstly their size which imbues them with the familiarity of certain everyday objects. In an interview in 1982 (at the time when he was making the earliest of this series) Deacon stated: 'in part the reason why the sculptures I have been making recently all tip or roll has to do with that notion of wanting them to be ordinary like everyday objects.'¹³ And he further elaborated: 'Ordinariness was what I think I was after in the ceramics. It does connect with . . . the kind of ambition that I now have for the sculpture. I find that certain ordinary objects of use and dress have a certain quality which is resistant to the kind of aestheticizing I think my chairs were victim of.'¹⁴ The combination of size, behaviour, method of making and even materials, in his smaller works, encourages the viewer to consider them as objects one might come across in mundane circumstances.¹⁵ As sculpture, they are self-evidently objects but, additionally, they seem to strive to exist as objects in the world at large, not necessarily as things apart. It is this capacity for being perceived as objects in two quite distinct ways that bears tellingly on Deacon's aesthetic, his ambition for sculpture, and for the role it might play.

Being that much smaller, the **Art For Other People** works are experienced very differently from their larger peers when they are encountered in the context of a gallery or museum.



Art For Other People No. 1, 1982
shown in the owner's house

In such company they seem, as Peter Schjeldahl notes perceptively, 'distinctly underscaled . . . (and underfoot'.¹⁶ Ill-at-ease, even incongruous, their position seems precarious, provisional, almost endangered; the spectator often feels like removing them to more propitious situations, elsewhere. Given that they are all readily portable and could, under normal circumstances, be easily housed, this wish to convey them to safer ground has a firm basis in reality. Yet because they rarely sit four-square on any horizontal surface but lean, tip, roll or otherwise maintain a casual equilibrium, all possible sites will come to seem temporary, adequate to the occasion perhaps but far from permanent. This is more than a matter of adaptability, of an easy-going flexibility. For unlike many other objects, including small sculpture, they are far from accepting their resting place passively, inertly, fixedly: they are nomads.

In establishing a different, and distinctive, set of allusions and mode of behaviour in the **Art For Other People** sculptures Deacon provides them with a significantly different role. In contrast with the rest of his work which clearly depends on a specialised 'neutral' gallery/museum setting (or its surrogates outdoors such as city plazas, parks etc.) not merely for optimum viewing conditions but ultimately for their meaning, these works are itinerants: they inhabit a variety of diverse contexts without sacrificing either identity or autonomy. Yet to say that they welcome other types of context is not to claim that they stand outside a conventional aesthetic and market structure; that

they seek either 'alternative' spaces or non-art identities. Deacon no more attempts to call into question the commodity status of the art-object than to circumvent normative aesthetic judgments.¹⁷ It is, rather, the exclusivity of the domain currently accorded high art that he addresses. As objects destined to inhabit a wider sphere, they are not only set apart from his own larger works but also from much recent modernist sculpture which has once more defined its preferred home as the specialised environment of the museum.

Part 2

'If one word captures the aspirations of modernism from about 1870 until the Second World War', writes William Tucker, 'it is surely *object*. Firstly in poetry and painting, then in sculpture, music and architecture, the word came to denote an ideal condition of self-contained, self-generating apartness for the work of art, with its own rules, its own order, its own materials, independent of its maker, of its audience and of the world in general.'¹⁸

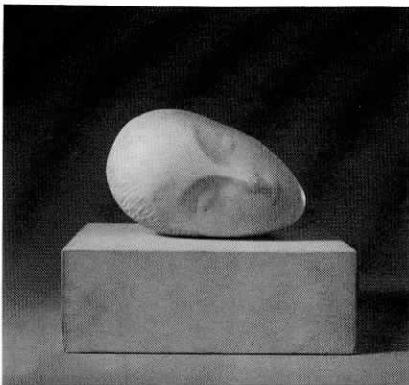
The modernist conception of sculpture as an autonomous self-contained object which inhabits real space, and yet remains a distinct category of three-dimensional entity, was gradually developed in the late nineteenth century. For the academic sculptor, small works had tended to be 'objects d'art' or miniatures, art-works belonging to a separate (subsidiary) genre of their own, and thus marginal to 'his' central activity or ambition as the creator of monumental public projects – even if, as was often the case, it was these diminutive works that provided the financial basis of his practice. For the modernist sculptor, by contrast, monumental commissions are not only a rarity, but almost antithetical to his practice: the gallery/museum is the ideal locus for his object. The much-vaunted homelessness of modernist sculpture, following its descent from the plinth and entry into the real space of its actual context, presupposes this segregated institutional framework. That most modernist sculptors at the beginning of the twentieth century worked on a reduced scale was, however, usually the result of circumstance or of necessity – as much to do with the fact that many

of them were firstly painters and only secondly sculptors as with financial constraints. Yet small size did not preclude a monumental statement in three-dimensional work any more than it did in modernist painting of the period, much of which may have been easel-sized but was not, on that account, designed for a domestic or private audience. Within this body of early modernist sculpture there are, however, certain seminal pieces in which size and scale do become congruent. Whereas some, like Brancusi's *Sleeping Muse*, are heads, several take still life as their subject, most notably, Boccioni's *Development of a Bottle in Space*, Picasso's *Glass of Absinthe* and Duchamp's *Bicycle Wheel*. These are, exceptionally, objects in a dual sense: sculpture-as-object, object-as-sculpture.¹⁹

The marked preference for a mural scale in post-war painting soon gained its counterpart in three-dimensional work. Nor was it any coincidence that a new focus on literalness and facticity – on 'objecthood', in short – should appear in sculpture soon after Frank Stella, declaiming 'My painting is based on the fact that only what can be seen is there. It really is an object', began his series of black canvases in 1959.²⁰ Central to the debates surrounding sculpture during the early sixties was this question of its object-hood. Two quite distinct, and conflicting, approaches developed. On the one hand there was the work that adhered to a Greenbergian aesthetic, exemplified in the sculpture of Anthony Caro. On the other, there were various attempts to make assertively three-dimensional things; things which, like most plastic things in the world, were grounded in actuality. If the former had its roots in Picasso's cubist constructions, the latter derived almost as much from Duchamp and Brancusi as from recent American painting.²¹ The terms of this debate were vigorously and lucidly set forth in two articles that appeared in an anthology edited by Gregory Battcock in 1968 entitled *Minimal Art*: Bruce Glaser's 'Questions to Stella and Judd', and Michael Fried's polemical essay 'Art and Objecthood'.²² Fried castigated Minimal work, which he termed literalist, for being theatrical, arguing that it depended on a situation that incorporated the object, the beholder and the actual context into a reciprocal relationship. It extorted a special complicity from the observer, one in which both the duration of the experience, and the

actuality of the locus are crucial. Fried contrasted this mode with the removed presentness of the work of Caro, a presentness that ultimately, although he did not acknowledge this, becomes a kind of absentness. Since Caro's work is primarily optical, pre-eminently present to the viewer by means of his or her sense of sight, it lacks that quality of being 'just there' in the real world that informs the work of Judd and other Minimalists. In this respect as in others Caro's work scarcely partakes of the kind of existence which pertains to ordinary objects.²³

Further complicating the issue was the fact that Judd did not regard his own work as sculpture. In 1965 he had written an influential essay, entitled 'Specific Objects', in which he attempted to identify what he considered to be a new mode of art activity – object-making. To him this innovative three-dimensional work constituted an alternative to the ostensibly constrained and tired modes of painting and sculpture; this work 'opens to anything' and 'needs only to be interesting', he argued.²⁴ Judd both sketched the range and diversity of this burgeoning activity and identified certain of its common characteristics. Among the latter he stressed wholeness, 'The thing as a whole, its quality as a whole is what is interesting'; the preference for unconventional materials and their direct use in ways that rendered them 'specific' and 'obdurate', not 'obviously art'; and the concern that the 'form of a work and its materials are closely related'.²⁵ Of the numerous artists mentioned, a number had works illustrated, including H.C. Westermann, Claes Oldenburg, Richard Artschwager, Lucas Samaras and Yayoi Kusama. While many of them made objects closely resembling real objects not all of them would, however, have vehemently repudiated the label of sculptor. And while several made objects of a reduced size, most obviously Samaras and Oldenburg whose works suggested modified everyday entities, the majority did not. Indeed, a certain minimum size came, in time, to characterise not only Judd's work but that of most other prominent object-makers of this ilk. The attitude behind their decisions regarding size and scale is brilliantly encapsulated in those much quoted responses by Tony Smith to questions about his six-foot steel cube, *Die*, of 1962:



Constantin Brancusi
Sleeping Muse, 1909-11, marble, 17.8 cms high
 Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden,
 Smithsonian Institute, Gift of Joseph H. Hirshhorn, 1966



Vladimir Tatlin
Model for Monument to the Third International, 1919-20
 Courtesy Society for Cultural Relations with the USSR

'Q: Why didn't you make it larger so that it would loom over the observer?

A: I was not making a monument

Q: Then why didn't you make it smaller so that the observer could see over the top?

A: I was not making an object.'²⁶

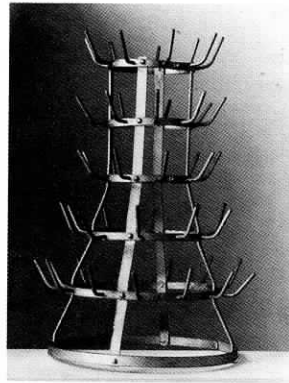
Citing this exchange, Robert Morris drew the conclusion: 'The intimate mode is essentially closed, spaceless, compressed and exclusive.'²⁷ Not surprisingly, intimacy is a quality seldom found in the work of object-makers during the sixties, with the notable exceptions of Oldenburg and Samaras.

In 1972 the issue of sculpture-as-object and its relationship to real objects was again broached, this time by William Tucker in a series of articles, later published as a book, *The Language of Sculpture*. Although Tucker argued that 'The ideal of the object was enormously fruitful in sculpture, and most notably in the period 1907-1915', ultimately he felt that there were considerable dangers in this connection, even conflation, of the sculptural object with the real object: 'Subsequently the accessibility of the ideal for sculpture created particular problems As the sculpture-object approached the reality-object in form and intention, the gap between them dwindled to the point at which all reasons for making sculpture, and indeed art in general, seemed to disappear. This was the nature of the crisis that was experienced by advanced art in the 1920s It is as though the positions gained were incapable of steady development, but demanded either the unconditional surrender of the

conventions with which they had been warring (but on whose existence their art depended), or counter-revolution.'²⁸ For Tucker, the exceptional achievement of the period 1907-15 depended on a finely attuned balance between image and object, a balance in which neither became dominant. This he discerned not only in Brancusi's *Sleeping Muse* from 1910 but in certain readymades of Duchamp, in Tatlin's *Monument to the Third International*, and in Rietveld's celebrated *Red-Blue Chair* of 1918. Although Tucker asserted that 'Duchamp, Tatlin, Rietveld and others, whatever their own beliefs as to the significance of what they were doing, produced objects which can now be seen to belong to modern sculpture,' he did admit that 'The process of reclaiming their work for sculpture has been protracted It is only in the last few years . . . that the potential of gestalt, scale, structure and material implicit in the work of these artists could be appreciated and used.'²⁹ For Tucker, 'The formal integrity which these objects possess is typical of a great number of useful objects in general circulation in the nineteenth century where function, economy, and efficiency had been the only determinants of design. It was Duchamp's achievement, in spite of himself, to bring this whole area of form and use of materials into sculpture, where subsequently it has been untapped, except in the work of David Smith'.³⁰ Notwithstanding his admiration for Smith's art Tucker believed nonetheless that 'the abstract formal power of the *Bottle Rack* as a total configuration is still unequalled



Gerrit Rietveld
Red-Blue Chair, replica of the 1918 original
University of East Anglia Collection



Marcel Duchamp
Bottle Rack, original 1914 (lost)
6th version, Galleria Schwarz, Milan, 1964

in sculpture.³¹

Despite their very considerable theoretical differences, Tucker's fascination with this particular readymade was shared by Judd. While the latter saw a connection between it and some of the innovative three-dimensional work produced in the early sixties, Tucker felt that far from being a seminal predecessor of a new mode of art, and from heralding a novel relationship to the real world, as Judd regarded it, the *Bottle Rack* was virtually unrecognisable *except* as sculpture, that is, in terms of its abstract formal properties: composition, proportion, structure, and use of materials.

In 1972 Richard Deacon was in his final year as a sculpture student at St. Martin's. Although mainly involved with process and performance-based work, he became interested in the theories of both Tucker, who was then teaching at St. Martin's, and Judd. Tucker provided him with a model, exemplary in his methods though not necessarily in his answers, of someone engaged in an exacting examination of traditional sculptural concerns.³² By contrast Judd, who vigorously shunned precepts from the past and all relation to tradition in order to bring the work of art into the real world in an assertive forthright manner, proved influential on account of his stress on the facticity and materiality of the art-object, its location in actual space and in real time. If, unlike the American, Tucker confined his questions and thinking about three-dimensional form to matters pertaining specifically to sculpture, this distinction

may have seemed of relatively little importance at a moment when the art-work conceived as a three dimensional plastic entity was under relentless attack.

During his postgraduate years, in the Environmental Media Department of the Royal College, Deacon started to become increasingly preoccupied with the object in its own right instead of as a prop, or product, in a performance situation.³³ But it was only in 1980, after his return from the United States, that the full implications of Judd's aesthetic became central to the problem of making sculpture as he perceived it, and only in 1982 that he finally focussed on the core of this debate concerning the relationship between sculptural object and real object.

In 1979 when executing the suite of drawings ***Its Orpheus When There's Singing*** Deacon had written in a notebook: 'These drawings are intentionally extremely representational. I have difficulty in deciding of what they are representations. This concerns their reference. I have difficulty corroborating their reference with *something*. Except I have considered *Sonnets to Orpheus* as their subject' (my italics).³⁴ With a pot, as noted above, there could be no such difficulty. Even if it appeared to Deacon at the time he made it that its identity served principally as a kind of 'nexus' around which the object could cohere formally, with hindsight its role in the real world, vouchsafed by its identity, was seen to be equally crucial. For the pot provided a model of the way in

which art-objects might exist outside the confines of the studio/gallery setting; maintaining its identity as an art-work while taking its place comfortably and unostentatiously in everyday contexts. It attains this dual existence without insisting upon a self-conscious separation or segregation from other types of cherished articles or everyday artefacts.³⁵

Deacon affirms his belief that how an object is made is crucial to its identity by way of an anecdote which he relishes. While assembling **Blind, Deaf and Dumb** outside the Serpentine Gallery in 1985 he overheard two youths discussing his sculpture: 'Look at that! What's that then, is it ducting?' 'Naa, it's art. Look at the way it's put together' came the reply.³⁶ In the early eighties Deacon insisted upon being called a fabricator rather than a sculptor. Given that he is a constructor not a carver or modeller, there is an obvious appropriateness in this, but there may also have been an (unconscious?) desire to separate himself from those artists returning at this time to conventional means and methods of making: for example, Barry Flanagan began exhibiting his large stone pieces and modelled hares in 1980, and 1980 was also the moment when the so-called 'bronze revival' gained widespread allegiance. Yet this designation also evokes the much-discussed philosophical concept of man as maker – of *homo faber*. And since it is on account of Deacon's approach to making that the **Art For Other People** works first reveal their identity when encountered in situations other than those of the gallery or studio, this allusion is particularly apposite. The associations that this series conveys of products, instruments and tools from the early modern age, give additional weight to this reference.

In her influential book *The Human Condition*, a book which Deacon read with interest in the mid-seventies, Hannah Arendt explores the philosophical basis of this concept of *homo faber* in some depth. Although unable to pin down the origin of the term, she notes: 'The Latin word *faber*, probably related to *facere* (to make something in the sense of production) originally designated the fabricator and artist who works upon hard material such as stone or wood.'³⁷ For Arendt 'Productivity and creativity, which were to become the highest ideals and even the idols of the modern age in its

initial stages, are inherent standards of *homo faber*, of man as a builder and fabricator.'³⁸ What distinguishes *homo faber* from *animal laborans* is the fact that only the former seeks to build a man-made world which will serve more exalted needs than simply those of easing the burden of survival. Tools and implements always remain at the disposal of *homo faber*, who relies on them not to mitigate the toil of labour as does *animal laborans*, but in order to construct a world of things, a world more durable, lasting and objective than one which is the fruit of subjective needs. 'The man-made world of things, the human artifice erected by *homo faber*', Arendt writes, 'becomes a home for mortal men, whose stability will endure and outlast the ever-changing movement of their lives and actions, only inasmuch as it transcends both the sheer functionalism of things produced for consumption and the sheer utility of objects produced for use.'³⁹

Arendt argues that the late modern era has witnessed the defeat of *homo faber* by *animal laborans*: 'even now, laboring is too lofty, too ambitious a word for what we are doing, or think we are doing, in the world we have come to live in. The last stage of the laboring society, the society of job-holders, demands of its members a sheer automatic functioning, as though. . . the only active decision still required of the individual were to let go, so to speak, to abandon his individuality, the still individually sensed pain and trouble of living, and acquiesce in a dazed, 'tranquillized', functional type of behaviour It is quite conceivable that the modern age – which began with such an unprecedented and promising outburst of human activity – may end in the deadliest, most sterile passivity history has ever known [Nevertheless] men persist in making, fabricating, and building, although these faculties are more and more restricted to the abilities of the artist, so that the concomitant experiences of worldliness [the genuine experience of and love for the world] escape more and more the range of ordinary human experience.'⁴⁰

Deacon's activity as a studio-based artist accords well with Arendt's image of the individual participating in an interactive situation through the medium of his creative products. For although the social life of *animal laborans* is worldless and herd-like, that of *homo faber* fully deserves the designation

of a public realm: *'homo faber*, the builder of the world and the producer of things, can find his proper relationship to other people only by exchanging his products with theirs, because these products themselves are always produced in isolation. The privacy which the early modern age demanded as the supreme right of each member of society was actually the guaranty of isolation, without which no work can be produced.'⁴¹

It is not necessary to attribute to Deacon Arendt's views on the current predicament of mankind nor on the role of the artist in society in order to find a telling relationship between the **Art For Other People** objects and the world of *homo faber*. In this vision of a man-made society where the tools and implements as well as the manufactured products bear the imprint of early industrial techniques of fabrication and of mass produced commonplace materials, there are clear parallels with Deacon's **Art For Other People** series – although his preference for ordinary everyday artefacts which structure and inform experience but, unlike the mass media and technology, do not attempt to infiltrate or control it, owes much, by his own account, to the German poet Rainer Maria Rilke.⁴²

In structuring man's experience and informing his sense of the world these types of objects play an analogous role to that which Deacon proposes for sculpture. He believes that 'sculpture mediates and models a notion of what the world is like', a belief which owes as much to sculpture's embodiment in language as to its objecthood and its material identity.⁴³ Deacon has repeatedly asserted his conviction that language structures experience, that it creates and reforms the world: 'What I think is that song is the power of speech. I think of speech as being in between our private selves and the world. The power of speech is a social condition of being human. Language is one of the primary means which allow us to operate on the world, both to recognise and to give it shape.'⁴⁴ He stressed this shared, public nature of language when he stated: 'Language is an intermediary state between perception and the world; it is a necessary condition for there being anything intelligible, for there being any kind of world at all. Language is neither object nor subject but something in between.'⁴⁵ This vehicle, through

which we construct the world from undifferentiated experience, has as its agents the senses of sight, hearing and speech.

Also inscribed in language, sexuality is a further means through which experience is modulated and conditioned. Since Deacon first adumbrated these ideas in his suite of drawings from 1979, allusions to sensory and sexual organs have recurred over and over in his art in different forms and guises. Indeed the principal unifying feature of his large-scale sculpture is this repertoire of motifs relating to bodily organs, orifices and genitalia, and thus by extension, to notions of speech, of hearing and of language in general.

However, as argued above, this is not the prevailing source of imagery, reference and metaphor in the **Art For Other People** series. Here, the realm of allusion pertains primarily to physical implements, tools and other artefacts with which man manipulates the world, and creates an artificial context in order to exist above the most basic level. Related to the body via its strengths and mobility, these artefacts also inhabit a public interpersonal space. And just as language is 'between' us and therefore shared, so those items designed specifically to accommodate the body – notably dress, tools and furniture – reflect a marked degree of commonality. Since we experience the world through our bodies, their scale and proportions, as well as through our sense organs, such objects may therefore serve as interlocutors or mediators for our experience of one another, imbricating the physical with the visual by means of their single source in the human form.⁴⁶ Thus the **Art For Other People** sculptures act in tandem with Deacon's larger works, as complements not alternatives within a unified vision.

When, as found in the Orpheus tale, speech is elevated to the level of song, or tools and artefacts are theorized in the concept of *homo faber*, they operate at the level of myth or typology without becoming divorced from their actual counterparts in the contemporary world. This can be demonstrated by examining closely the roles of songlines in the life of the Australian Aborigines. Song serves them as a means of creating the world and of providing the individual with an identity, as well as a map of the physical terrain, a chart of the

topographical land mass. Deacon's contention that 'To sing or to praise not only describes the world but brings it into being' draws closely on the ideas of Rilke who regarded speech in the guise of song as the principal means by which Orpheus permeates the world, but it has recently received a reformulation in Bruce Chatwin's study of Aboriginal songlines.⁴⁷ Chatwin compares these examples with vocal phenomena produced by other nomadic groups such as gypsies as well as by certain species of birds which also structure their physical environment by means of sound. His book interested Deacon in part no doubt because it provides contemporary analogues for the Orpheus myth, but probably also because it gives great currency to notions which have to date tended to be mostly discussed in specialist contexts and at the level of abstraction, namely in the fields of linguistics and literary theory.

Part 3

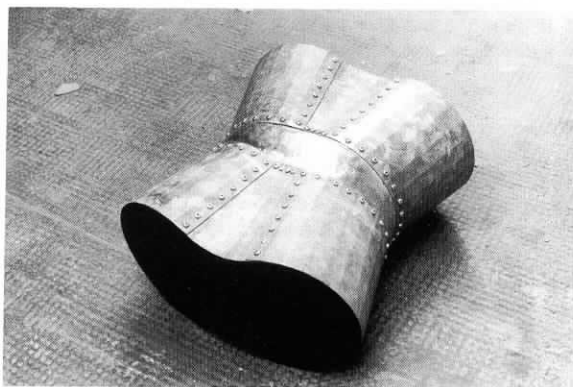
When in 1970 Carl Andre was questioned about the implications of moving his sculptures from place to place, he replied: 'I don't feel myself obsessed with the singularity of places. I don't think spaces are that singular. I think there are generic classes of spaces which you work for and toward. So it's not really a problem where a work is going to be in particular. It's only a problem, in general, of the generic spaces: is it going to be the size of Grand Central Station or is it going to be the size of a small room?'⁴⁸ Andre's examples of different types of generic space included 'inside gallery spaces, inside private dwelling spaces, inside museum spaces, inside large public spaces, and outside spaces of various kinds too.'⁴⁹ His inclination to consider these various types of space primarily in physical terms typifies the classic modernist position which treats such spaces as extensions of the museum, and thus as aesthetic sanctuaries.

At the end of that same decade Richard Serra vigorously argued the converse: 'At least with most sculpture, the experience of the work is inseparable from the place in which the work resides. Apart from that condition, any experience of the work is a deception . . . There is no neutral site. Every context has its frame and its ideological

overtones.'⁵⁰ For him, 'The institution of the museum invariably creates self-referentiality, even when that's not implied.'⁵¹ Whereas for the Minimalist this self-referentiality ensures the hermetic character of the work, to Serra it inevitably invokes the persona of the artist. For Deacon however, whose work matured at least a decade later than theirs, self-referentiality occurs within an interpersonal arena, within a locus that is psychologically as well as literally shared.

Although the seventies failed to establish any lasting 'alternative' contexts, its legacy includes a self-conscious awareness of the values as well as the physical characteristics inherent in any site. In treating the gallery as a certain type of structure, as a 'neutral container', Deacon seeks to make the abstract, or metaphysical, content of his work visible. By capitalising on what he perceives as shared within this arena he avoids on the one hand subjective statements together with the kind of unmediated expression found in much sixties constructed sculpture, and, on the other, the unsustainable hermeticism of Minimalist art.⁵² He seeks to ground his art in objective reality both by establishing the sculpture as a real object in actual space, and by drawing on the primacy of language in structuring experience: for example, its social character is intimated, and reinforced, by his choice for titles of figures of speech, idioms and colloquialisms.

Irrespective of whether these **Art For Other People** sculptures are exhibited alongside Deacon's own larger pieces or in group shows, 'their definitive tone' as Peter Schjeldahl acutely notes, 'is one of being out of whack anywhere.'⁵³ They cohabit best in informal situations, often alongside quite other types of objects. They are nomadic, but not on that account homeless. According to the artist, 'The **Art For Other People** series, the smaller works, were originally started as a very deliberate exploration of the social area of the work.'⁵⁴ In these small pieces Deacon can be said to be proposing a singular alternative to the homeless state endemic to much modernist sculpture, undermining the social isolation of sculpture as a fine art by seeking out spaces in which the discourse of high art is traditionally absent. By grounding the **Art For Other People** sculptures in a symbiotic relationship with real



Untitled, 1988

Aluminium, galvanised steel, stone and screws, 28 x 50 x 43 cms
Courtesy Marian Goodman Gallery, New York



Sleeve, 1988

Galvanised steel, coat sleeve and screws, 65 x 18 x 16.5 cms
Courtesy Marian Goodman Gallery, New York

objects, and by shunning narrative, illusion and situational anecdote in favour of the iconic, Deacon locates his sculpture in a tradition that has its origins in certain works by Duchamp and Brancusi. Like theirs, Deacon's works also bridge the fissure that conventionally divides sculpture from other objects, and like theirs, his works achieve this without sacrificing one to the other.⁵⁵

Footnotes

- 1 Deacon has long had close links with contemporary ceramics both through his marriage to Jacqui Poncelet, a celebrated ceramicist, and on his own account: he has written about it on various occasions. In these texts he often examines issues that are equally germane to his own work, such as ways of making the inside and outside of a vessel seem somehow separable, and thus belying the viewer's knowledge of their togetherness. That Poncelet, together with other close associates like Carol McNicoll, was at this time veering far from conventional notions of functionalism in her work should be noted.
- 2 *Richard Deacon Talking About For Those Who Have Ears No. 2 And Other Works*, Tate Gallery, London, 1985, p. 12.
- 3 Of this group, some were destroyed during their passage back to Britain, and others have been given away to friends, with the exception of that particular pot discussed here in some detail: Deacon still owns it.
- 4 'Richard Deacon Talking To Caryn Faure Walker', *Aspects*, Winter 1982, n.p.
- 5 *Sculpture: Kevin Atherton, Richard Deacon, Shirazeh Houshiary*, Greater London Arts, Bexley, 1984, n.p.
- 6 Interview with the author, August 1988.
- 7 When he commenced this series Deacon did not have a large corpus in mind. It has grown erratically over the past six years, as occasion prompted, to number almost thirty at the time of writing (August 1988). (**No. 3** has been destroyed by the artist.) Deacon states that two recent small sculptures, **Untitled** and **Sleeve** both made in response to an invitation to participate in the exhibition *Made To Measure* (Kettles Yard Cambridge, 1988) also belong to this series in principle though they were not so titled.
- 8 Although seen from above they are not read in relation to the plane of the floor, for normally the horizontal and vertical coordinates are closely matched, and the form compact. Figural, landscape and pictorial readings are thus precluded in favour of metaphors relating to 'things'. In this Deacon concurs with Richard Serra who argued in 1970: 'When pieces are viewed from above, the floor functions as a field or ground for the deployment of decorative, linear and planar elements. The concern with horizontality is not so much a concern for lateral extension as it is a concern with painting. Lateral extension in this case allows sculpture to be viewed pictorially - that is, as if the floor were the canvas plane The crucial concerns confronting sculpture today are the avoidance of the concerns properly belonging to architecture and painting' (*Richard Serra Interviews 1970-1980*, The Hudson River Museum, 1980, pp. 15-16).
- 9 There are several exceptions to this, including **No. 12** which does not seem adequately integrated, **No. 18** whose components resemble the two halves of a single unit, and



Chair, 1972

No. 21 which is again less integrated than many.

Exceptionally, it embodies an image of a tool attached to an artefact.

- 10 There is very little part-to-part composing in Deacon's works. Techniques like laminating were chosen mainly for the very reason that they got around the problem of joints by making apparently continuous form. Other related devices included 'excessive' use of screws and rivets to create an overall surface pattern and so prevent undue focussing on the few actual points of articulation.

- 11 This equivocal relationship to the ground is common also to his larger pieces where again it serves to help establish a self-contained autonomy: to Deacon, 'they are resting on the ground according to themselves, not supported by it'. (P.E. Bickers, 'A Conversation With Richard Deacon', *Art Monthly*, Feb. 1985, p. 17.)

It is perhaps also worth noting that recently when both Shapiro and Wilding have had recourse to very small dimensions they have chosen to work on the wall, and thus to remove the sculpture to another realm. In so doing they perhaps are acknowledging the difficulty of ensuring an adequate installation for small free-standing sculptures.

- 12 *Sculpture* . . . , Bexley, op. cit., n.p.
Michael Newman argues persuasively that this enforcing of a physical distance from the work is necessary to maintain its separateness and integral unity as 'other'. (ref. 'The Face of Things', in *Richard Deacon Sculpture 1980-1984*, Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh, 1984, p. 38.) Note also William Tucker's statement: 'I began to understand that distance – the space between the viewer and the object – not space, the space within and around the object, was the problem: twentieth century sculpture has depended on controlling and preserving the distance of the spectator from the object.' ('Introduction', *William Tucker*, Annelly Juda Fine Art, London, 1987, n.p.).

- 13 'Richard Deacon Talking to Caryn Faure Walker', op. cit., n.p.

- 14 *ibid*, Deacon made a set of chairs while at St. Martin's School of Art. If the fact that he finally preferred them as non-functional entities – i.e. devoid of seat and back-rest – is illuminating, so is the story of their genesis. Faced with a

project that required that the students generate money in order to mount an exhibition of their work, several of them as was their wont, according to the artist, disdained the obvious solution of simply going and getting a part-time job in the art-world, and sought alternative means. While one resorted to betting, another became a tea-lady, and a third sold shoes. Deacon decided to make furniture which he planned to sell to help finance the show in which his contribution would consist of the means by which his participation was made possible: namely, the furniture. He set about teaching himself the necessary skills and in due course constructed several chairs. But having completed and sold one, he decided that he preferred it before the back and seat had been inserted; that is, as an abstract form rather than as a utilitarian object. At this point, his role in the project came to a halt. With hindsight, it seems that his preference was not a purely formal one, for what distinguished the quasi-chair from other abstract objects that he might have made, was the very fact that it was not abstract and, equally importantly, it was not representational. It had signifying properties and these derived not from decisions concerning its making, materials and form alone, but from its function. And yet, in becoming 'useless', it had gained an autonomy, abstractness and self-sufficiency denied a real chair.

- 15 Deacon himself has been involved to some extent in repositioning them, showing several on occasion on tabletops, shelves etc. and/or in other types of contexts, including a library. Yet he generally avoids placing them on a pedestal when installing them in a gallery or museum. That this risks removing them from the actual space of the room/site to an indeterminate virtual space was demonstrated when two were placed on a plinth in the exhibition, *Starlit Waters* (Tate of the North, Liverpool, 1988.)

- 16 Peter Schjeldahl, 'Richard Deacon', in *Richard Deacon*, Fundación Caja de Pensiones, Madrid, 1988, p. 31.

- 17 Comparison with some of Jeff Koons' recent objects is pertinent here. Both Koons' and Deacon's works have among their antecedents Duchamp's *Bottle Rack*, just as both, albeit in different ways, can be said to draw on the legacy of the 'specific objects' of the sixties. If Judd was correct in forecasting a new category of three-dimensional work, one which can now be identified as (post-modern) object-making, he failed however to see that his own work could also be a vital conduit for a viable ongoing modernist sculpture. Koons and Deacon invoke the borderline between real object and sculptural object from these alternative positions. Koons' aluminium cast *Rabbit*, 1986, sardonically addresses the way in which the sculptural object has become a commodity alongside other artefacts. Casting, a technique which does double duty here, both alludes to sculpture, and serves to distinguish this object from its model, a plastic commodity, by transforming it – but ironically, since casting is also a means of mass reproduction. And since Koons' edition is artificially restricted, its exchange value replaces its use value. It thus becomes the vehicle through which he examines the relationship between art-object and commodity. In making objects by hand, objects which are thus inevitably singular, Deacon reverses this relationship. Since his technique in itself precludes any conflation between art-object and commodity, on one level at least, he re-establishes the relationship through difference.

- 18 William Tucker, *The Language of Sculpture*, London (1974), 1977, p. 107. Tucker's book grew out of a series of lectures. Four of its chapters were first published as articles in *Studio International* in 1970, others, including one entitled 'The Object', from which this quotation is taken, appeared in *Studio International* from October 1972.
- 19 This was clearly evident in a show entitled *Pioneers of Modern Sculpture*, organised by Albert Elsen for the Hayward Gallery in London in 1973.
The surrealist object does not come into this discussion being mostly a collage intended to shock or to evoke onerotic states: equally removed are those enigmatic sculptures of Giacometti, such as *Disagreeable Object, To Be Disposed Of* from 1931.
- 20 Quoted in Bruce Glaser, 'Questions to Stella and Judd', *Minimal Art*, ed. Gregory Battcock, New York, 1968, p.158. (This interview was first broadcast in 1964 and then published in *Art News* in September 1966.)
- 21 For example, Carl Andre's interest c. 1960 in Brancusi, and especially in his *Endless Column*, was shared by Phillip King at that time. King recalled later: 'In *Window Piece* was the idea of sculpture like an object, a tangible thing graspable in the sense that, say, a table or a chair are graspable. In fact the drawings done round about that time are closer to the works of American sculptors than my present work. ('Phillip King Talks About His Sculpture', *Studio International*, June 1968.)
- 22 Deacon has long been familiar with these texts and has cited them on a number of occasions.
- 23 Michael Fried's 'Art and Objecthood' was first published in *Artforum* in June 1967. It followed several articles on recent sculpture by Robert Morris, published the preceding year, in which he stressed the contextual relationships linking the object and its surroundings.
Note also Clement Greenberg's contention that 'No other sculptor has gone as far from the structural logic of ordinary ponderable things', a view of Caro upheld by Fried who, in stressing the abstractness of Caro's works argues that they 'inhabit another world from the literal contingent one in which we live'. (ref. Michael Fried, 'Anthony Caro, Table Sculptures', in *Anthony Caro Table Sculptures 1966-1977*, The British Council, London, no date, n.p.)
In the sixties Caro sought an opticality that both denied the physical character of the sculpture, and the materiality of the stuff from which it was made. Partial exception should, however, be made for certain of his tabletop and writing sculptures, both of which employ found objects. To some extent these given objects retain their identity and materiality in the new compositions. These are among the few groups of Caro's work to which Deacon feels responsive.
- 24 Donald Judd, 'Specific Objects', reprinted in his *Complete Writings 1959-1975*, Nova Scotia/New York, 1975, pp. 181,184.
- 25 Judd, op. cit., pp. 187-188.
- 26 Tony Smith quoted by Robert Morris, 'Notes on Sculpture: part II', *Artforum*, October 1966, reprinted in Battcock, op. cit., pp. 228-230.
- 27 Morris, op. cit., p. 231.
- 28 William Tucker, op. cit., p. 107.
- 29 Tucker, op. cit., pp. 116, 118.
- 30 Tucker, op. cit., pp. 120-121.
- 31 Tucker, op. cit., p. 121.
- 32 This position was fully set forth in the exhibition, and accompanying catalogue, *The Condition of Sculpture*, which Tucker organised for the Hayward Gallery, London, in 1975.
- 33 Changes in his thinking may be traced through a series of papers, mostly unpublished, written for this course. See also 'Silence, Exile, Cunning, Section A, 1977-1978', in *Richard Deacon*, The Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh, 1988, p. 12.
- 34 Quoted by Michael Newman, 'The Face of Things', in *Richard Deacon Sculpture 1980-1984*, op. cit., p. 37.
- 35 Comparison should be made with other artists who have had recourse to this sculpture/object relationship, including, amongst Deacon's peers, Cragg, Woodrow and Wentworth, all three of whom utilise actual objects. Though each is concerned with first-order experiences with the world about him, none establishes quite this sort of relationship.
If encountered in a context other than that of a gallery/museum, the identity of their works as sculpture would be signalled by the incongruity of their appearance in that spot rather than by their means of making. In this they reverse the way in which Deacon's works announce themselves.
Note should be taken of Henry Moore who in the thirties within the framework of a vitalist aesthetic was inspired by models and instruments which he discovered in the Science Museum as well as by natural forms like bones, pebbles and shells. But while Moore collected and treasured organic objects such as driftwood and fossilised rock it is unlikely that he would have regarded early industrial artefacts or models in the same light. David Smith who is closer in this respect to Deacon incorporated actual objects into his constructions but in ways that generally meant that their identity was largely subsumed to the new motif.
- 36 Quoted in Schjeldahl, op. cit., p. 31.
Compare this with Tucker's claim: 'Rietveld's chairs, together with Duchamp's *Readymades* and Tatlin's useful objects and glider, demonstrate how the object had itself become subject: that it was in the end the quality of the artist's eye, hand and mind, that would distinguish his object from other things and from reality in general.' (op.cit., p. 126).
Nevertheless, ideally, sculpture 'could be an object among objects, privileged only by its unique configurations, its lack of recognised type or function. Its unity would be its own, not that given by an existing model in reality.' ('An Essay on Sculpture', *Studio International*, Jan. 1969, p. 13.) In contrast to this Deacon suggests it is how something is constructed – literally and metaphorically – that determines this difference. And whereas for him it attains a degree of objectivity by capitalising both on its actuality and by its use of interpersonal modes, Tucker by contrast situates his sculpture firmly in the realm of virtual space and of subjective invention.
- 37 Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition: A Study of the Central Dilemmas Facing Modern Man*, University of Chicago, 1958, p. 341 (Tucker acknowledges the importance of this book for his own writing in his Preface to *The Language of Sculpture*, op. cit., p. 7.)
- 38 Arendt, op. cit., p. 269.
- 39 Arendt, op. cit., p. 153.
- 40 Arendt, op. cit., pp. 294-296.
- 41 Arendt, op. cit., p. 141.
- 42 By the 1920s Rilke, for whom feelings and values are stored in everyday things and events, was lamenting 'the ever swifter

- vanishing of so much that is visible, whose place will not be supplied The animated, experienced things that share our lives are coming to an end and cannot be replaced.'
- 43 Quoted by Charles Harrison, 'Empathy and Irony: Richard Deacon's Sculpture', in *Richard Deacon*, Fundação Caja de Pensiones, op. cit., p. 26.
- 44 Quoted in *Richard Deacon Talking About . . .*, op. cit., p. 7.
- 45 Unpublished lecture, Sydney, Australia, May 1988.
- 46 This notion of the physical body serving as an intermediary and mediator for experience has long preoccupied Deacon, as may be seen in a suite of drawings made in 1973 which articulate various parts of the body. These drawings were made at a time when he was reading Oskar Schlemmer's writings and participating in a theatre class based on the teachings of Grotowski. It also underpins his later interest in tailoring and other modes of sartorial expression; witness **Sleeve**, 1988, and **Art For Other People No. 8**. There is perhaps a danger of overstating the distinction, based on the kinds of metaphor that they generate, between these two groups of work. Deacon saw in the container-like shapes populating his 1979 suite of drawings reference both to Orpheus' head, with the aperture being 'either a mouth or an ear – or . . . his musical instrument which is a means of production of sound', but, equally, 'very domestic objects particularly pots and pans, shoes and hats – there are lots of objects which have a volumetric shape with an opening.' (*Richard Deacon Talking About . . .*, op. cit., p. 7.) It could be argued that several larger works such as **Other Men's Eyes No. 1** draw on both sets of reference.
- 47 'Silence, Exile, Cunning', op. cit., p. 15. Referring to his 1979 suite of drawings Deacon explained: 'The content has to do with a notion about song or what Orpheus' song does to the world and what the nature of the song might be. The notion that I tend to work with is that as a myth or story concerned with the origins and functions of language and the way in which language works on the world Orpheus has both a singing voice and an instrumental voice.' (*Richard Deacon Talking About . . .*, op. cit., p. 7.) In his account of the songlines Bruce Chatwin states 'Aborigines could not believe that the country existed until they could see and sing it – just as, in the Dreamtime, the country had not existed until the Ancestors sang it Everyone inherited as part of his or her private property, a stretch of the Ancestor's song and the stretch of country over which the song passed. A man's verses were his title deeds to territory The aborigines' religious duty is to ritually travel the land, singing the Ancestor's songs, singing the world into being afresh [A] song [is] both a map and a direction finder Providing you knew the song you could always find your way across the country [The songlines] are ways of communication between the most far-flung tribes, . . . the whole of Australia could be read as a kind of musical score, . . . music is a memory bank for finding one's way about the world [Even] trade-routes are songlines – because the songs not things are the principal medium of exchange. Trading in 'things' is the secondary consequence of trading in song.' (*The Songlines* (1987), Picador, 1988, esp. pp. 15-17, 64-66.)
- 48 Phyllis Tuchman, 'An Interview with Carl Andre', *Artforum*, June 1970, p. 55
- 49 *ibid*
- 50 'Richard Serra's Urban Sculpture: An Interview – Richard Serra & Douglas Crimp', July 1980, in *Richard Serra Interviews 1970-1980*, op. cit., pp. 170,168.
- 51 Quoted in Douglas Crimp, 'Serra's Public Sculpture: Redefining Site Specificity', in *Richard Serra Sculpture*, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1986, p. 47.
- 52 This concern for something grounded in a more objective mode than that of personal expression informs all Deacon's mature work; note, for example, the way that the shapes generated from geometric forms in the **Its Orpheus When There's Singing** suite evolved out of a type of rule governed activity.
- 53 Schjeldahl, op. cit., p. 33.
- 54 *Richard Deacon Talking About . . .*, op. cit., p. 13.
- 55 In her challenging book on twentieth century sculpture, Rosalind Krauss also links Brancusi and Duchamp, but for different reasons: 'the real sense in which the two men can be coupled in discussing the development of twentieth-century sculpture is that both of them took the same position on the question of sculptural narrative . . . creating work that questioned the very role of narrative structure by gravitating towards that which is unitary and unanalyzable.' (*Passages In Modern Sculpture* (1977), MIT Press Paperback, 1983, p. 103.)