

The making of the *Art For Other People* pieces has been often recounted and every commentator has rightly stressed the lexical nature of the series. Within Richard Deacon's recent work uniting form and language, this lexicon of forms represents, I think, the only reminder of the way in which words run throughout his oeuvre, words that may even construct and sustain the work (see, for example, *Fruit*, 1985). It is therefore worth mentioning right away that in 1986 the artist revealed that this series was begun as a result of an interview which raised questions he found difficult to answer. These objects are thus built on the often spectacular - indeed, aphasic - silence that characterizes Deacon's public statements.¹ Deacon often dramatizes his difficulty with outward expression, because it corresponds to the Artist's poetic task of turning himself inside out, reversing inner and outer, inverting private and public. This inversion is embodied in the very title of this highly personal series, a series that seems to convey confidential information: *Art For Other People* might better apply to Deacon's public commissions than to such direct expressions of creative intimacy. This ambiguity is echoed in the singular spatial inversion found at every step along the way, so that the pieces in this series could be read from back to front, and each tiny revelation could represent a public affirmation or manifesto.

It might be worth pointing out that British art provides precursors to Deacon's proposed interiority, his inverted, inside-out world. This is notably the case with 14th-century architecture when the perpendicular style emerged simultaneously with fan vaulting. These two opposing aesthetic tendencies can be seen together in the Henry VII chapel in Westminster, which displays the economical, almost musical regularity of tall perpendicular windows on the one hand, and the extravagance of stellar vaults supporting enormous pendant keystones on the other. According to Panofsky, these imposing pendants give the impression of an inverted universe, suggesting an upside-down world.

In studying Deacon's work, it is tempting to accept his invitation to consider each piece as a delicate membrane or diaphragm that resonates to a dense hum of connotations. Let us initially consider one of his most laconic pieces, *Art For Other People N°21*. Four shafts are stuck onto a bright bulb of riveted metal, placed near a dull grey, biomorphic shape suggesting a virtual sheath or envelope. The various oppositions are all significant - dull grey / coloured, hard/soft, dark /bright, outer /inner, etc. As always, there are numerous representational associations - octopus, male, female, light bulb, bagpipes. References to Deacon's earlier work are equally obvious, notably to *Out Of The House* (1983) and *Tell Me No Lies* (1984).

From an architectural angle, the elements comprising this piece re-invoke the allusion to gothic art made above. Here, radiating ribs, keystone and membrane-wall are dissociated elements that make it possible to construct a virtual space. The sculpture has been analytically dismantled like a sentence, that is to say a scholastic approach has parsed demonstrative architecture out of gothic art. The dark surface might also evoke Francesco Borromini's use of a membrane-wall on the moving facade of San Carlo alle Quattro Fontane. Deacon's interest in architecture is noteworthy. Indeed, during an unsuccessful attempt to work with Richard Rogers in 1985, he became intrigued by Pierre Charreau's *Glass House*. The Charreau house also employs a membrane-like wall, for an outer skin of glass receives and diffuses light. The architect invented a system of external lighting, since the glass wall allows the inside of the house to be lit from the outside. It therefore no longer obeys the inner-outer distinction - instead, it permeates, reciprocally conveys and communicates. The fragile barrier described here as "membrane" is actually a communicating diaphragm, a type of skin that finds its most intense expression in the human face. Since it is generally agreed that any discussion of Deacon's work should invoke Rilke, it is worth recalling Rilke's description of Rodin's *Man with a Broken Nose*. Rilke described the face as full of movement, agitation and undulation - "shadows moving ceaselessly in sleep, and light seeming to slide gently across the forehead... This face was not merely touched by life, it was entirely garbed in life, as though a ruthless hand

seized it in mid-course and plunged it into a whirlpool of waters that clean and erode." This is not to suggest that the strange black surface is a face, but that the meaning of its imperfect closure bears study, thus revealing its role as diaphragm, a surface of transmission rather than of separation. It is worth noting that this shape -neither flat nor deep, neither open nor closed - was also produced in glass as part of a collaborative effort with Francoise Guichon at Marseille's Centre International de Recherche sur le Verre et PArt (CIRVA). This demonstrates the extent to which Deacon has translated the notion of transmission into his choice of material itself, indicating that this part of N°21 is to be seen not as form, but as space.

Near it, the strange bulb and shafts directly, if equivocally, suggest the idea of a light source. This subject was handled by Giacomo Balla in a painting titled *Arc Lamp* (1910, Museum of Modern Art, New York). A similar bulb occupies the plane while yellow chevrons carry the light to the dark edge of a pitch-black night. The use of yellow rays to convey light brings to mind the chapel in Santa Maria della Vittoria in Rome, where an ecstatic Saint Teresa is bathed in a golden shower of light. Deacon knows this piece well, for he studied it closely following the 1984 publication of a crucial text on his own work by Michael Newman. Newman compared Deacon's *On The Face Of It* (1984) to Saint Teresa's naked, voluptuous foot as it emerged from the folds of her habit. Newman's thoroughly convincing comparison concluded with an appreciation of the visual impact of Bernini's composition. "The Ecstasy of St. Teresa as a whole is a metaphor for what cannot possibly be represented, the warm yellow light from a concealed window irradiates the sculpture, stone brought to life, as a metaphor for infusion of Divine Grace... ." Deacon seems to have been quite literally impressed, for Newman's article predates the piece under consideration here and may well have been a source of inspiration, even if thoroughly reinterpreted by Deacon. It should be added that the powerfully erotic impact of Bernini's sculpture can also be found in Deacon's oeuvre, quite obviously in N° 21 as well as in *Feast For The Eye* (1987) and *The Eye Has It* (1984). A sexual reading of Deacon's oeuvre must be linked to the viewer's perceptual ability to sense an "other" space; sexuality becomes a system for exploring voids.

Returning to the representation of light as a potential source of inspiration, it should be pointed out that another Deacon sculpture reworks the same theme in a completely different way. *More Light* (1988) presents spectators with a huge, bright metal disk resting on arches that seem to describe the source of that light, the disk itself evoking the reflectors on an old-fashioned bicycle. Given this light inspired context, the dull grey shape near the bulb in N°21 obviously suggests a shadow, sustained in the solidarity dictated by the very meaning of the concept. This of course immediately brings to mind the tradition of describing night or darkness by a cloak falling on the world, as seen, for example in Poussin's *Diane and Endymion* (1632, Art. Institute of Detroit). The figure of Night is seen gently pulling back drapery that reveals the approach of Aurora driving Apollo's sun chariot. There is a strict parallel between the gap in the veil and the gradual dawning of light. Deacon employs a similar device to achieve unity in this piece despite the heterogeneity of materials and the apparently disjunctive distance between the parts. Yet this void makes room for respiration that seems virtually organic. Emptiness becomes the very space of the sculpture, describing the relationship between shadow and night as defined by shifting patterns of photons. Michel de Certeau claims that "space exists as soon as vectors of direction, velocity and the variable of time are taken into consideration. Space is an intersection of driving forces. It is animated by the set of movements active within it." Richard Deacon's space is "a common passage," the geometry of which is carved in the empty spaces in his sculpture.

Several works by Deacon convey the vitality of emptiness. N°14 in this same series involves cloth stuffing sandwiched between two skins and torn along the edges, apparently indicating the painful separation of an object from the space enveloping it. This confirms, if confirmation were needed, that site extends beyond mere form. Similarly, in *Mumuye* sculpture from Nigeria, busts carved in the heart of a tree stand within an empty space, a space itself enclosed within long, spiraling arms hewn from the bark. The whole tree, which incarnates guardian powers, thus draws life from the void that animates these extraordinary

sculptures.

This overly long article has simply sought to situate an uncontested masterpiece of modern art in an inter-related network of extraneous references. For I feel it is significant that Deacon's work draws itself into a network of concerns and problems shared by all other great civilizations, whether medieval, baroque or African.

(1) I have been struck on two occasions by Deacon's desire to speak out in public. During two lectures, one in French on the making of 'T' blind, Deaf and Dumb for the Serpentine Gallery and the other on David Smith given in English at the White-chapel, I witnessed Deacon's extreme difficulty in expressing himself. To the point where I understood that this was a conscious and deliberate move to keep the audience in extraordinary tension and turmoil. For it suffices to meet the artist or read his texts to appreciate his supple expressiveness, backed by admirable literary and philosophical learning. What Deacon was in fact expressing during such silences was the Artist's poetic effort to transform inner into outer.

