

Pier Luigi Tazzi

From a conversation with Richard Deacon

*RD* When I was talking not long ago of my work in Vienna I developed a kind of description of the type of work I was making now and I discovered to my own surprise that I was defining a relationship between what I was doing at that time and what I had done twenty years before. I thought that in a way length was becoming an uninteresting element within the work itself. Half-way through the 70s the problem I was trying to deal with, the ambition I had, was that of trying to make sculpture where meaning was examined. And this represented that type of literalness which was in all the discussions between the end of the '60s and the beginning of the '70s. The fact that things were just the way they were would have denied them. In other words, given that things were the way they were, it seemed as if they had a meaning that was taken for granted. The first solution I had was to do things that would have a different look from one side to the other or from the different points of view that you could see from. In this way the identity of the work was subject to the position the spectator took. The relationship which was established between spectator and work took on a very strong dynamic. In practice the identity of the work was a construction in the mind of the spectator. Recently I started to think that one can also imagine that time is constructed in a sequence that belongs to the person who imagines it. All of this was neglected until the end of the '70s and I had tried to create work in which all the elements were brought to the surface in such a way that the form and volume encapsulated a hollow space. The space constituted both the identity of the work and the place of meaning; but the meaning was ambiguous compared with an exterior that on the other hand was clearly determined. The construction of the meaning was at the same time subject to and connected to a manifest physical exterior and built in a certain manner. In this way the body of the spectator as body of a subject that had experience was set against the imaginary body of the work. The meaning was formed between this hollow shape and the body of the spectator. A possible scanning of the works of the '80s implies consideration of the relationship between shape and volume. The dialog that is established between these two elements also implies a relation between interior and exterior. When I talk about my work, which happens often and every time I make some changes, I often use different images as a means of analysing different experiences or ways of indicating continuity in relation to images of precise things. One of the images I used some time ago was the figure of a horse in a field, in order to try to describe the difference between image and volume. Imagine this horse as form whose entity is made up of its volume. There is then an experiential disparity between the horse as idea and the horse as entity, in such a way that the volume which I had considered necessary to use had something to do with the idea of an entity, or was tied to the idea as entity, without in any case having a specific relationship with a special type of entity. What counted was that it distinguished itself from the countryside. If I was speaking about entity I was speaking about something which was not the field. If it had a sense of figure, the volume I was using gave a sense of separate-ness rather than marked continuity with the world. The hollow space was important. It was important that the volume was made within a form. Another experience is the one connected to the differences between various types of geographical maps: for example the road maps and the maps of the islands. While the road map presents a continuity, the maps of islands present shapes. The shape seems to have something to do with something else, while the continuity has to do with the identical. Even if the relation is with ways in which the profile describes something without specifying any of the interior, as soon as you learn something about the interior, the profile stops being that, abandons its state of separate-ness, so that the relation between

interior and exterior is a relationship between abstraction, alienation on the outside, and empathy and comprehension on the inside. Recently I have begun to ask myself if the "other" that I was talking about when I was dealing with points of view and succession, that "otherness that characterises my work, the "other" of the work I considered in the 80s, does not belong to space and has nothing to do with the relation between entity and space. Equally, I asked myself if succession meant that we can make an object which had the same otherness in time as in space, implying in this way a multiplicity of points of view/and I am still talking about a physical object. I have often thought that time was inside work, time as sum or sequence of manual operations; or that the sense of the work consisted of the registration of time in the work itself. Some of the work I've done recently has a structure based on profiles and projections through volume, the way of obtaining various depths in sequence and changes of points of view. This shows how the material is made up in time as well as in space. That is why recent work is so materially dense and the space is hollow. This is clear in the large work at Hannover in which the hollow space is dense without being solid so that the full space projects its own image onto a profile, or rather that which you see together with the surface you can see and which changes according to how you move. It is during recent work that I have tried to use materials as if they were arranged in space and time in order to have a special entity. But I'm going too far: THIS has to do with the reading of a work, with a reading of ambiguity.

PLT This also explains the evolution of hollow transparent forms that have a large hollow space between the structural lines, to the closed forms you are making now.

RD At a certain point I started to not want to create linear works. I wanted to create works that used volume. I think the reason why I didn't want to create linear works was that the linearity seemed to be excessively descriptive when compared with the form. The paradox is that if it stops being linear in a certain sense the volume disappears behind the structure. A certain solution to this problem was that of creating works that were of a very low profile in this sense: pure volumes, volumes in the sense according to which the liquid has volume without being forced or limited by external tensions, and therefore a volume less heavily dogmatic in the phallic sense.

PZT In a way this sort of evolution is present as symptomatic anticipation in the book you published in Oslo. In the first part there are photos and drawings where the linear element prevails over the image, while in the second part there are tumultuous masses that make up and at the same time obstruct the image.

RD The book arrived at an important time. It also had to do with problems of here and there, the plane and the prospect, knowledge and experience. All this is implied. The photocopies were framed to give the idea of a picture. The photocopies were in accordance with the page. The profiles enclosed a specific volume as you have said. The photocopies, in two parts, presented an overall complete picture rather than a counterpoising between one part and the other. The book describes the figurative aspects of the problem and tries to transfer and propose a parallel comparison (that is why I used the images) without figuratively describing certain aspects of the thing seen. One of the hesitations I had was that it might have been possible to identify the work with nature and this was not very important for me. This isn't trees or water, even though there are aspects of the experience of this type of thing that are very important.

PLT the difference between the two parts of the book is also in terms of indification of a concrete entity. In the first part there are photos; in the second part this entity is identified almost by its own imprint (the photocopy), and it isn't possible to go beyond the surface of what appears.

RD I thought that in the first part of the book there was something similar to the process of abstraction. Because of the fact that the image was often rather deep, but often had an element in the forefront and the design was relative to the page in the same way in which the element in the forefront was related to the background. One of the disconcerting aspects is understanding how this flat profile projects something

that has depth, a prospective depth that anticipates something. In the second part of the book the drawings present a quality that is more static in comparison with the image; they do not present depths so that, contrary to expectations, the flat thing seems to be presenting something with a stronger penetration into the world compared to something that seems to have a more complex volume and that seems to be more distinct. We have already spoken of this in relation to the Krefeld exhibition. In many ways the Krefeld exhibition is parallel to the form of the book, or presents affinities with the form of the book, also in the use of a frame in relation to the vision. There is a marked overlaying between the book and the exhibition, even if the exhibition has a dimension which is different that depends on the relationship with the Haus Esters and Haus Lange. Large, and with an exhibition installation.

*PLT* In the book, since it went through the camera, all the images maintained that element of reality that the photographic language, the photographic code, allows and offers. The book has in a way the character of a programme.

*RD* Yes, it is a programme, a guide or a manual.

*PLT* Sure, a sort of guide that brings to light the difference between abstraction and experience.

*RD* I don't think the abstraction is so far from the experience. The book has to do with the problem of admitting that we can't be in two places at the same time. You can't be in the thing you are looking at and look at it at the same time. There is a dichotomy between the experience of something and looking at a thing.

*PLT* Yes, because looking implies a distance and it is by reducing the distance that one gains access to the thing or at least this happens according to Western codes of representation that always imply an idea of loss, missing the experience or a reduction of the possibility of vision.

*RD* But also loss of position.

*P/.7* This has never been a big problem for you; in your work the position is an essential feature.

*RD* You mean position as place, or position in a hierarchical sense? No, the opera indicates that we have to change position.

*P/T* When I see a work of yours, I think it is a one-way process. You start with a drawing, make a plastic and then create the work. There is this sort of procedure from a drawing to the real object, but where usually, at least in Renaissance tradition, in the dominant Western tradition, one can always return from the end product to the design, in your case it is impossible: it is like the point of an arrow that enters easily into the body, but is very difficult to extract.

*RD* Right.

*P/T* What I mean is that I don't think it is a problem in your case changing position, and for me this is a very positive affirmation.

*RD* For me too.

*PLT* In other words, one can base oneself on one's stand. It isn't a problem. And this corresponds to the affirmation of a certain kind of culture.

*RD* The type of thing I wanted to do had a degree of independence in relation to other types of thing. So they were necessarily consequential to the operations which produced them. My relation as author isn't the fundamental trajectory to be followed in an approach to the work; it is the relation with other entities that constitutes the fundamental way of making it into an experience. Obviously if I speak about the work, I demonstrate it in a certain type of sequence, but in relation to the things what I wanted to do were things where the position of the author was reduced and the principal relation was that of other sorts of things.

*PLT* The maker becomes increasingly more important than the author.

*RD* It was important that things got done. The plastic aspect, that is manifest in material effects is an important component, but it is a relationship of doing more than being the author.

*PLT* Doing in the widest sense of the word.

*RD* Signs don't have the same meaning as models.

*PLT* I have always had the impression that your last works, especially the two in Hanover and Middelheim, were more detached from yourself, can be read in a certain way and are dry. I don't know if that's right or just very personal for that time; it's a feeling. Since this entity is so autonomous and so definite, even the imaginary connection between constructor and the opera seems minor. The works at Middleheim and at Hannover acquire such an autonomy, their entity is so defined, that the type of connection with the maker becomes as subtle as the position of contact that is established between the work and the spectator becomes stronger.

*RD* If this is true it means that I can do what I want, that my voice as author has been transformed into the voice of the maker and at the same time that it has undergone a reduction, which means that the work has acquired an autonomy that frees me from the style, expressiveness, from this overall type of problem. If it is so, it means that I can be the spectator of my own work. However, I wouldn't want to force this analysis too far, but as a description of a quality of experience I find it very positive. What keeps me back from proceeding in this direction is that I ask myself if it is or is not a question of scale. But then when remembering my last exhibition that I did at Marion Goodman's, which presented qualities that fully satisfied me, I realise that the work was smaller, so I am convinced that it is not a question of scale.

*PLT* In a way these works are very imperative.

*RD* You mean they impose themselves a lot.

*PLT* Yes.

*RD* That they impose themselves or that they create an imposition?

*P/T* That they impose themselves with a sort of affirmative security that compensates for the loss of importance of the maker. It is like when the umbilical cord is cut and the new creature has to make its own way. This character reminds me, with the due difference, of certain works of de Chirico. There's a work entitled "Mobili nella valle" in which the objects have acquired a complete autonomy: they have left their context and invaded outer space, acquiring that autonomy which renders them detached from their diverse functions to which they were destined when they were in the place for which they were made. In the case of de Chirico there was the pleasure of the maker who became spectator, but there was also a double meaning tied to the end of a period and the start of another, this mingling of sensations, nostalgia for things lost and enthusiasm for the proliferation of new autonomous entities. I am thinking of Mayakovsky who, more or less at the same time, called one of his works "The Revolution of objects" And I refer just to the title. What I find important is the positive recognition of proliferation, not proliferation as symptom of illness, but proliferation as possibility of new ways of being.

*RD* If this is true, I would be very glad if this were the case with the type of things I've done. Because in a certain sense this also satisfies some of the anxieties we dealt with before. This autonomy constitutes a certain form of protection of the context. Or if it is not a protection, a way of redefining context, re-evaluating context, re-textualising. But also to do with a certain sense of positive freedom from personality, not an evasion of personality, not a denial - just a freedom.