

SARAH TRITZ

Shapes and Their Need to be Free and Independent

Translated by Alan Eglinton

WHAT I MEAN BY "SHAPE":

I'll choose one of the dictionary's definitions of the word "shape": All the contours of an object or being resulting from the structure of its parts. (Le Robert, French dictionary)
For me, a shape is something concrete which comes into being in ways which remain undefined, those of the imagination, of "thoughts" and emotions (what was once called the "fluctuations of the soul"), in a process which is fuelled by my attention, by my looking at my surroundings. A shape includes the idea of translation: I translate reality through my subjective field of perception and in a sense, I interpret it¹.

In 1971, Saverio Vertone wrote:

"Fabro made five feet (four out of different types of marble and one in bronze), slightly baroque, slightly Michelangelesque, slightly Pharaonic, vaguely surrealistic, rather absurd, sumptuous and even beautiful. There shouldn't be anything else to say or to explain, looking at them should be enough. But of course, it isn't. Yet these feet are indeed exceedingly visible. There they are, lined up, witnesses to a suspicious, preposterous, disproportionate and seedy expressiveness. For example, one is exceedingly aware of what they're made of: a display of marble, metal and silk, and you notice that they're finely-worked. As for the shape, it's even more apparent; designed deliberately at the moment it distinguishes itself from the material, roughly torn out of the stone or decisively printed on the aluminium, ostentatiously separated from its mold as was light from darkness on the first (or last) day of Creation: a sceptical and brutal mimesis of the arduous freedom of art²".



Luciano Fabro, Feet, 1968-71

IS A SHAPE AN OBJECT?

This is a very tough question. I haven't really succeeded in answering it. Shapes are more and more the result of a composition of objects.



Sarah Tritz, If Music be the Food of Love, 2007

I distinguish a shape from an object by its materiality. I call "shape" something that begins with matter, where the artist is free to take the properties of the materials into account or not. What is certain is that I establish a confident relationship with matter. Fabro uses the word "metaphysics" to talk about the transformation of matter through the artistic act. He uses this word in a very precise and "careful" way.

1. The scanned images accompanying the text underline, through their texture, that they are not exact reproductions of the works. Because this texture allows for an active appropriation of the works, I have decided to keep this form, which I used in my contribution to the symposium in October 2008, in this publication.
2. Saverio Vertone, Luciano Fabro, cat. Galleria Arte Borgogna, Milan, 1971, quoted in Luciano Fabro, cat. Centre Pompidou, 1996, p. 216.



Rachel Harrison,
Marlon and Indian,
2002



Isa Genzken,
Empire Vampire, Who Kills the Death,
2003

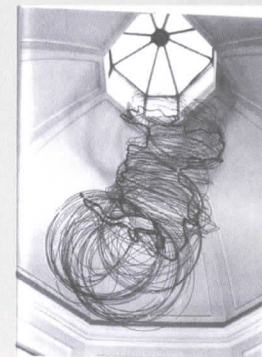
I find this word difficult to use. It's true though, that a shape creates a displacement in the act of looking. An object cannot provoke that specific and dynamic gaze on the part of the viewer.

I establish an empirical relationship with my materials. A technical approach is secondary and can sometimes prove necessary.

In 1980, Fabro said about his Italies in Letture Parallele: "I need to know how my hands work on something that remains static. The shape of Italy is static and fixed. I measure the mobility of my hands by working on a fixed thing. Italy is like a sketchbook, a promemoria. I've used it over the years: if I'm studying something new, I test it in an Italy³".

Fabro uses a "fixed" shape to break it down effectively.

3. Letture parallele IV, Luciano Fabro: *Padiglione d'arte contemporanea, Milano, 1980, ed. Silvana, Milano, 1980.*



Luciano Fabro, Italies.

2 EXPRESSIVENESS AND INCARNATION AS POSSIBLE WAYS OF APPROPRIATING A FORM AS A SUBJECT

I feel that certain contemporary shapes are weakened by an uncertain position; they are neither shapes nor objects. There's a flaw. The shape seems to be less and less the consequence of an action. Maybe this is because they aren't the result of an "empathic ritual".



Paul Thek, Technological Reliquaries, 1966

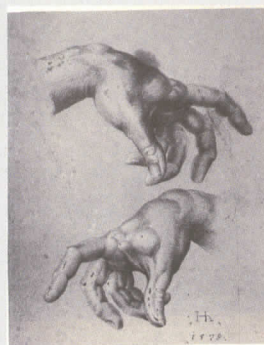
In the beginning, I want to go astray... to lose myself. This doesn't mean becoming distracted, but like Aby Warburg's doctor, Binswanger, I believe "creation takes place when the mind wanders off the beaten track".



Grünewald,
Altarpiece, Issenheim
(detail), 1512/1516



Sarah Tritz, Un Joyeux Naufrage !
(detail), 2007



Dürer, Study, 1579

In my work, making a shape is sometimes a double performance: incarnation through modelling, and construction during the installation of the work.

Incarnation is only possible when the representation of a living being is involved. For example, if I'm sculpting a dog, I become one myself.

For most of my work, once the show is over, what I've created is destroyed. This accelerates my engagement and creates a dynamic quality of attention. Each shape is a means of understanding something at a precise moment. It has to answer a question. Otherwise, there is no real need for making it.



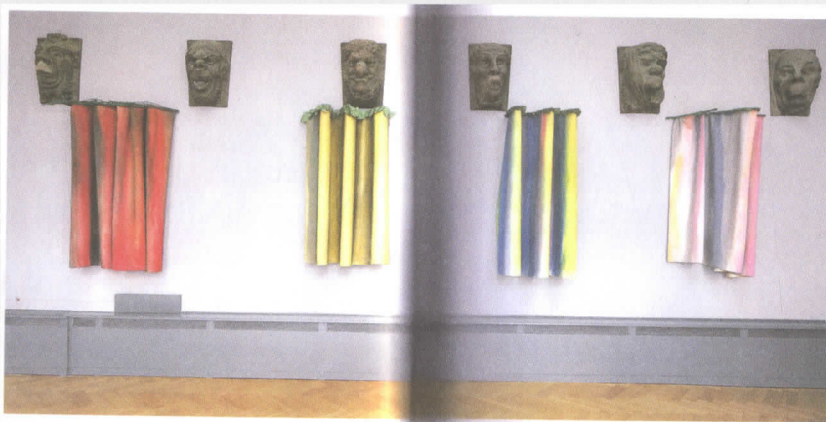
Sarah Tritz, Le Chien-chimère, 2007

SHAPES AND THE ISSUE OF CONTEXTUALIZATION

The cult of contextualization:

Exhibition press releases are there to "overinform" the viewer. Form is almost suppressed. It is placed in a subordinate position, after its contextualization. To me, historical influences are the condition of any form. However, they can't be named so easily, because they're inevitably filtered through the artist's perception. They can't therefore be immediately identified. It's through this subjective filter that I weave connections within the history of art, having interpreted and understood certain forms. This process takes place with the help of time! One cannot make a list of artistic influences. It would be a sort of methodological mistake to think that on the one hand there's a sheet of influences and on the other a blank sheet on which the artist designs his work... I disagree: the sheets must collide! We're forever losing confidence in form.

Could we be the victims of some kind of guilt? Could it be too difficult to impose one's perception of the world? Must one legitimate one's position by citing influences?



Luciano Fabro, Hat Stand, 1979-82

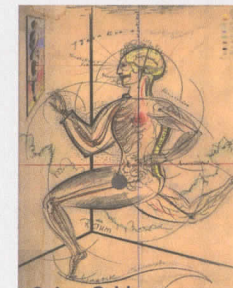
The cult of contextualization induces an artificial relationship with the work. In other words, the work becomes disembodied and we are distracted from the experience of space.

It's as though we're forgetting what's most essential, namely our upright position and our incomprehension, our subjective view of the world.

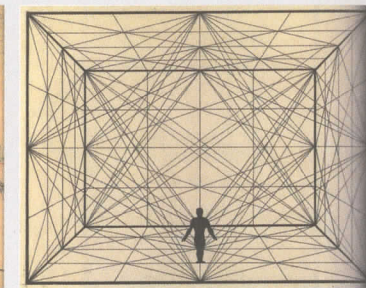
Of course, people position themselves differently. To me, the easiest and most immediate position is physical because it implies the body and therefore gravity and my upright position. Here I'd like to underline the importance of the "empirical self".



HC Westermann, No Man Stands so Straight as when He Stoops to Help a Boy, 1968



Oskar Schlemmer, Man in the Circle of Ideas, 1928



Oskar Schlemmer, Figures in Space with Plane Geometry and Spatial Delineations, 1924

4 POSITIONING: A PHYSICAL AND POLITICAL COMMITMENT

A position is unavoidable; I must adopt a position. The word "position" implies our bodies. I'm constantly balancing, as an artist and as a human being, in an upright posture. I'm in a state of tension when I'm creating my shapes. I fight against falling.

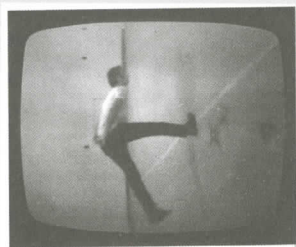


Sarah Tritz, Untitled, video-performance, 1999

Being an author implies positioning oneself. You must lead the viewer to put him or herself in the same balancing position as yourself. Positioning has both a political and physical implication.



Paul Thek, Fishman, 1968



Bruce Nauman, Slow Angle Walk (Beckett Walk), 1968



Franz Erhard Walther, Standing Piece in Three Section, 1975

Positioning is also made possible by means of the surface of a shape. Fabro would most likely have talked about the epidermis, of this aspect of the material and of the impact it may have.

In 1979, Fabro said about his piece The Judgment of Paris (Il Giudizio di Paride)⁴:

"What interested me was the material's tactile aspect, its outer skin. The four objects are all different because each of their surfaces was treated differently every time. I realized that I was conveying the idea that the difference between people was due to the difference of their skin texture. I was expressing this idea by the means of touching and modelling surfaces with my thumb. Therefore, the work's skin was produced by my own skin".



Luciano Fabro, The Judgment of Paris, 1979

5 FROM THE MUTE SUBJECT TO THE SPEAKING SUBJECT

In the beginning, one must be able to create something that one couldn't formulate or bring into existence through language. There's a connection between a certain form of silence and the creation of a shape. Perhaps the shape's strength and character lies in its capacity to generate a deficiency, an absence of words and a gap (the ideal place for a shape) in the first stage. When the process of creation is at a more advanced stage, form and language become active on a same level. Without language, I cannot develop the intuitive premises that the shape presents to me. When the shape isn't yet finalized, a dialectical method sets in and it's at this point that language becomes a tool.

4. Quoted in Margit Rowell, "From James to Bernini, a Pragmatic Sensibility in a Baroque Form", in Luciano Fabro, cat. Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco, 1992, p. 17, quoted in Luciano Fabro, cat. Centre Pompidou, 1996, p. 216.

I force myself at a certain moment to position myself outside the space I'm working in and language then completes my reflection and announces the beginning of a creative strategy. I use the word "strategy" somewhat ironically because there's a strategy to adopt at this stage of the work to make the shape evolve from its original state as a shapeless thing. Either I choose to resist its authority or not, and it's then that I must take it in hand by working on its character. It's at this moment that I stand back and that I battle with the shape which hasn't yet reached a certain degree of certainty. Only then does language become a dialectical tool, creating a detachment which extracts the shape from the furrow it was in.



Sarah Tritz, *Orgie grise*, 2007

A shape is a precision tool which triggers the transformation of the viewer into a silent subject and then into a speaking subject.

A shape allows me to escape from clouded and imprecise perception. It makes things more precise. It makes my questioning of reality more specific. I couldn't have found this precision otherwise because I'm an artist and because I don't use language in the same way a theoretician does. I think that shapes should somehow make the viewer become mute.

I'm for recognition of the value of incomprehension as a first approach to reality. Shapes must present a certain degree of originality and from then on, one can start reflecting on what one sees by using language. Reflective detachment only exists thanks to this original experience, as modest as it may seem. The originality is relative because we may only be repeating what has been done already. Nevertheless, there are slight differences related to the "I", to the subject that I am and that the viewer is, which all redefine the work compared to what it was before. It's relative also because one is conscious of the history of art and one of the ways of understanding what has already been done is by "reappropriating/reincarnating" works which have marked us.

I think a shape must generate the position of a subject facing the world for both the artist and the viewer. I like to think that when facing art, one is first a silent subject and then a speaking subject and not the other way around. Otherwise, for me, it's a failure. Silence is linked to shock and to the inability to react to an original experience. Speech is linked to the formulation of having experienced that shock.

Initially, during the first few seconds of looking at the shapes I make and show, I don't want them to appear too obvious to the viewer. I want the structure and the existence of these shapes to appear once the viewer's body positions itself within the work.

Then, from this position, I'd like the viewer to be able to create his own reflective transitions generated by the shapes and for him to perceive with his own logic. If the viewer can do this, he can attain the same freedom I myself experience as an artist during the creative act and at this point, positioning oneself becomes political!

My shapes wouldn't have any freedom if I didn't trust the "viewer" and if I didn't involve him.



Luciano Fabro, *That's Life*, 1986