

**Nicola Carrino**

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Isn't it about time somebody proposed a Carrino *case*? The question seems to fall flat for two reasons: firstly, because in perfect bad faith, people are no longer talking about *cases*, with the result that this or that immediate compensation takes for granted a whole critical approach which, on the contrary, has been lacking every time; and secondly, because Carrino did get compensation, what with the 1960 Venice Biennale and in 1971 at Sao Paolo, Brazil, plus a number of subsequent representations at Milan, Modena and again Milan. Things being as they are, however, we have now emerged from a stage of preconceived views about him, in which the subject of Carrino has not been broached, and the link with time and the currents in which he has moved and taken part, have not been properly explored.

The preconception phase may be illustrated thus: Carrino is bracketed with the destiny of Group 1, in a muddled reproposal of belated constructivism in Italy, with a facile, critical commentator's dismissal of the problem. Thus, when the association broke up a few years ago, Carrino — as indeed the other associates in the group, Uncini and Frascà — found himself being appraised as an epigone of himself, and so on, from paradox to paradox.

If one looks carefully here and there at the negative analyses, the following points aspects of this preconceived view stand out: the group's poetics (which were still just the same even when the events had passed) entailed a sort of historical regression, because they were moulded on a purely didactic faith in methods of research and construction that had already faded out and were only being repeated through inertia; and again regressive, inasmuch as those formative movements are implicitly superseded by *crises* of informality or deformation that have deliberately cast doubt upon and in the meantime revived the argument about the actual scope for statement in artistic operations, and hence their moralistic, or ideological, *value*. One cannot but agree. Moreover, some of those dreary disquisitions on the visual rationalism of incredible neo-constructivisms are extremely puzzling<sup>1</sup>. But this leads right into the midst of the paradox, and the «case» of Carrino should serve at least as a pretext for

looking back over those years and fitting the picture together again. The paradox lies in this fact: that Carrino — although this should at least be extended to include his group companions — was close on the trail of that *crisis* and in several ways was amply involved in it, though without actually making it his talisman, without implying a sort of theatre within a theatre whereby everything blended into the image of the crisis. He was aiming rather to fit that crisis into a broader context.

It is not difficult today to object that the motivation behind Carrino's work does not consist of a statement of truth functionally or mechanically derived from «historical constructivism», but rather, of dialectics between formlessness and form, between formlessness and feasibility, in which constructivism is one of the indications of formative necessity, without thereby becoming in any way a conditioning factor. The same need to show the variety of implications in his own product testifies to Carrino's notion of speculative risk and emotive and psychological relativity, which dominates the formalization.

In short, one misunderstanding can confidently be removed, namely, that Carrino's research springs from a basic structure, an original buried somewhere beyond everyday chaos, from which to deduce a series of results capable of gradually moulding the events with enlightened certainty and rationalizing capability. If need be, in the face of such a hypothesis, Carrino embarks on an overturning process whereby the sequences of objects developed in the past years are not concerned with the approximation to an ideological or moralistic model, but are intended to underline the *fact* that each one *is there*, the fact of *becoming* (structure) and *manifesting* itself (expression), and the possibility of interpreting this kind of *fact* in the multiplicity of its extent.

Here again, a careful study of the works offered and exhibited over the years would have sufficed to show that they were asking to be bathed in light, in the variability of light, and hence that they were not only open to time, but were subject both to its partiality and to its relativity.

There has been — and this is where the differences begin — a definite refusal to cut down the aperture to an attitude (which is so variable that it is

in itself informal) that cannot in itself be referred to any logic or dialectical relation whatever. If Carrino is concerned with a mobility of attention and action that cannot be reduced to a diagram or be crystallized, he cannot refuse to emphasize a logic in the process, whose task is to make this mobility organic, to make sense out of it, and not vice versa. It is therefore possible, if not necessary and rightful, to reconstruct Carrino's development differently and to begin from the events of Group One<sup>2</sup>. It is still early to write the history of that group, its will and intentions, but two aspects of it are certainly exchangeable. In the case of Carrino, Frascà and Uncini, the research into structures took the form of a survey on the breaking point reached by formal possibilities once their law had been subjected to the pressure of physical, psychological or mnemonic events; and this pressure occurs automatically every time, since the law investigated continually alludes to it and recalls it, for that is where it comes from and where it returns.

To consider Carrino alone one need only reflect on the fact that the module — particularly more recently — necessarily recalls the notion of a transformation; nor does he give himself a module without physical, corporal weight, in which he stresses the measurement of the «form» of the module and not its composition according to a co-ordination of a pre-established image. The module is in the meantime an object, in that it objectifies the mental and physical principles of transformation which it contains and adopts as its own. Once a series has been composed it becomes clear that we are not dealing with a mathematical calculation of progression, but with situations of varying complexity and interference. What we are getting at is that they are not situations in themselves, but relations and connections with the onlooker.

The point to be considered is different, and in the present state of great confusion it is worth mentioning briefly here. It is to be noted that an artist's habit of reflecting on his work, in the belief that the language employed is not a function for saying other things «mentally» that are a valid but objective reality, is therefore, rejected or condemned by various quarters in the name of some sort of obscure version of freedom. The point this is just the point: that this kind of approach, to which Carrino is

indeed opposed, does have its truthful side and a clearly false consequence. True, the identification of the structure of the phenomena does not take into account the emotional, emotive, empathic or mental richness of the phenomenon, and indeed in itself degrades it to the level of technical opinions on compulsory possibilities of construction. But it is equally true that without the former (definition of elasticity and linguistic regulation as a germinative and transformative structure) allows neither recognition nor reason nor topology in the latter. The interrelation cannot be rejected no matter how the polarities at stake are configured. In a recent catalogue<sup>3</sup>, Carrino established a dialogue with the person introducing it, R. Sanesi, on this very point.

Sanesi wrote: «a choice between the will to “dispose of” and the consciousness of “belonging to”... a search for independence against an abandonment (with varying degrees of vitality, falseness and confusion, but nevertheless emotional) of an integrative type». And Carrino remarks: «Or at least the recovery of all this (and later on in the text you yourself amply explain it) through the unblazed trail of rationality, which does not mean to freeze, but to be conscious of working. There can be no further divisions between a logico-rational and an imaginative-expressive structure and it is not even integrative to regard either the logico-expressive or the imaginative-rational structures as generating structures. I feel that our research in the light of these latter patterns goes beyond the earlier ones, using the structure’s logico-rational base to connect miscellaneous imaginative-expressive uses, for example, of matter, which may be a structural element but cannot be detached from intrinsically emotional qualities. The logico-operative basic structure is therefore simply a pretext; open to possibilities of language in which, however, the constructive operation can always be found as a verification. The objectivity and autonomy, I think, should be referred to the methods and processes since no object can be eluded, even the coldly demonstrative object of geometrical postulations, or any expressiveness, including that very same icy expressiveness of a measuring operation». And we may observe a number of passages: the structure as a pretext and in the narrow sense: before the text is realized, (becomes and occurs), not as a method or a process, but as expressiveness. With a conclusion that is worth transcribing here in full: «In every situation the configurations are not resolved (though within the capacity for independent development of the possible *constructives* for imposing-proposing possible satisfactory self-representative solutions) as the best suited possibilities of intervening in the predetermined (determinant) context, but only and still as hypotheses for possible open situations with variable

choices, though geared to and derived from the probable proposed structure. As the constructives are done and undone, the concept of (permanent) perishableness (there is no doubt that an operation today affects only the socio-cultural background that produced it and no more) is replaced by a concept of momentary perishableness whose regenerating potential is a primary quality in the constructives».

So far we have talked about a structure, a module, and so on. But in what sense? Certainly not as a homogeneity and affinity between the parts, which on the contrary exist as an accumulation, a heap, a multiplicity. Hence not in this sense, and not in a mechanically inferable sense either. On the contrary, with the diversification of intentions and possibilities, we are shown how to switch from the present state to other states besides those intentions and possibilities actually realized.

Carrino’s work is at loggerheads with the idea of virtuality. Informalism, neo-Dada exhibitionism and conceptualism contain the affirmation of a virtuality that is brought about beyond the existing materials used; but still nothing is said outside the bounds of the intuitive evocation involved, beyond the possibility of that virtuality being accomplished and accomplishing. Carrino has moved within this silence. What this artist is trying to discover is that, far from being “*un geste irreflechi*”, the idea itself is a process that can be verified through materials and is consequently feasible.

While this is, broadly speaking, his area of activity, it should also be added that the construction, with its elements of conditioned surprise, is clearly intended to inform. This brings us back to the anti-form intentions that have characterized the past few years in all significant events in the arts. This information thus concerns not so much the forms given and proposed by the operator, as the reality of the processes undergoing a transformation in the (breaking) point in which these processes seriously repropose those tensions and needs for transformation that may be described as mental, psychological or what you will.

It is, therefore, a matter of transformation. For his section at the Venice Biennale, Carrino has written: «Availability is the concrete possibility of the constructives, a matter of doing and undoing, of structuring oneself in relation to every expressive solution and any poetic proposal, not remaining inert in time but continually regenerating oneself in the light of the different proposals produced by different structures. Transformation is the potential, organic and structural capacity of the constructives to assume different configurations and it is the awareness that the artistic work (the working) cannot be static or mimetic

(repetitive) even in relation to itself (possibility of the constructives). Although it is given, the communicating value of the constructive (informative apparatus-work), lies only in what it gives, in the instant in which it is produced, constructed and reproduced (re-invented, restructured) in the particular place and in the particular structure».

To record the Carrino *case* one cannot do better than to follow and comment on a certain number of stages in it, beginning from the beginning and taking as evidence the actual objects produced.

<sup>1</sup> The book by I. Tomassoni, *Arte in Italia dopo il 1945*, published in Bologna in 1971, is an example.

<sup>2</sup> For a choice of materials relating to this group, see F. Sossi’s booklet *Dall’occhio al cervello*, Taranto, Magna Grecia, 1965.

<sup>3</sup> *Progetto intervento verifica* (Carrino, Pardi, Spagnulo, Uncini), Milan 1972.