

**Peter Pakesch**

**„ ... mit geschlossenen Augen“ Gespräch mit Pedro Cabrita Reis**

**“ ... with my eyes closed” Conversation with Pedro Cabrita Reis**

**Peter Pakesch** How would you define space?

**Pedro Cabrita Reis** Space ... A word and an endless array of concept variations coming together with it, pushing us to a definition certainly hard to grasp, if that is what we want to do. Personally, I tend to believe in a more intangible notion that, in its apparent subjectivity, would be brought to us thru a deeper approach, away from the futility implied in the Sisyphus endeavour of finding an answer, which in vain would attempt to shed a precise contour upon our interrogations. Anyway, answers seem to be just another way to rephrase questions only now, without that little interrogation mark at the end of the sentence; and art itself does not seem to be seeking for the truth either. Such a definition, at its best, could ironically be the mere enunciation of every impossibility found in the itinerary to achieve the truth. But perhaps and, granting ourselves a lesser gravity, space can initially be understood as a process of recognition. A recognition of a difference, and ultimately an awareness of an impossibility: an “I” that cannot be, or become, an “other”. In fact, an irresolvable wound to be perceived as a tragic perception: a “self”, projected onto a totality, where this self and the (separated) “other” are bounded together, but where the possibility of “uniqueness” is not included. A territory of non achievement? An impossibility to enunciate perfection? Painting a painting, is painting the world less the possibility of its representation, but every artwork will permanently carry in itself this desire for perfection.

We might consider it as an ambition of fulfilling that void that disables totality from being total or one. A void we had a long time ago turned into a category we conventioned to name as beauty. Then, space could be the recognition of an impulse, the one of pursuing beauty, or in other words, a wound finally healed.

**Peter Pakesch** What a setting of thoughts, what a space of ideas evolves out of such a short question that seems so simple! We have to realise how many different concepts exist with such a condition of everyday experience. Is it that separating such elements of perception and conception are important for the constitution of an artwork, which in spatial terms always questions the given concept of space?

**Pedro Cabrita Reis** I believe we must be open to consider an impossibility of separation. Perception can only be "perceived" as part of, (and, at the same time, as) conception. If I do a portrait it is in the process of its conception that I acknowledge (or is it "revealed" thru?) all the instants (perceptions) which constitute a face. It is not perception and then conception, nor perception plus conception, nor perception and conception. It is here perhaps that we have to consider the necessity of "time" as part of our quest.

**Peter Pakesch** Is it that we tend to deal with space in a very subjective and intuitive matter first hand, as our perception is always centred somewhere in our head as the centre of our own three directions, the vertical as well as the horizontal?

**Pedro Cabrita Reis** Considering space as the commonly accepted idea of a surrounding/involving territory", that could probably be true. But, in this case, I think that your proposition implies thru such inner "cartography", a reference more to an awareness of the self than to a conscience of an alterity.

**Peter Pakesch** Don't we really experience space by moving in it?

**Pedro Cabrita Reis** The experience you are mentioning is again a conscience of "alterity" (otherness). The experience of space, it's the permanence of such conscience. Considering that objects a, b, c, etc. are inevitably external to an "I", it's the diachronism inherent to the perception of such different entities that is given to us as the actual experience of space.

Perhaps, we aren't able to move in space but merely able to create it.

**Peter Pakesch** And by exchanging possible experiences by other ones that move?

**Pedro Cabrita Reis** If we walk together into the Kunsthaus Graz space where *True Gardens #6 (Graz)* is installed and spend there as much time as we want, and come out to talk about it, I'm afraid that, after all, we wouldn't be so surprised by the many differences brought into the conversation upon the same subject. Is it because we are two different individuals? Perhaps not, perhaps while looking at and wondering around it, each one was in fact able to "see" the work. And afterwards, we can try to tell each other what we have seen, but none of us will be able to tell the other how we have seen it. In the end of the most demanding attempt to reveal or unfold the nature of what we've seen, there still remains a mute territory only comprehensible to the self, and "constructed" by an intelligence of the totality of this un-told. We could say, "I know it" but we would be unable to "name" it to each other ...

**Peter Pakesch** Is there an exchange of subjectivity? Are these processes part of creating the "aesthetic experience"?

**Pedro Cabrita Reis** Our sociability is based upon a possible articulation of rules more or less embodied in the relative inefficiency of language. From there, we derived to an economy of hypothetical conveniences publicly known as ethics, moral, religion, etc., etc., in fact an exchange of concessions. But, somehow opposed to this, I believe that the aesthetic experience is a process of irrefutable subjectivity, strictly individual. You can be reborn in front of the ocean or lose yourself looking at a Tintoretto for your lifetime or just a mere instant, but the illumination you get from it, will always be, no matter how, an unnamed moment, impossible to be appropriated by language, unable to be described, or even more than that, and in others words, unsharable. Endless pages carefully packed with words trying to describe an artwork became irrelevant when confronted with the inner silence generated within oneself by experiencing it. Still there is no exchange of subjectivity at all because it can't be named. We must

insist again and again on the complexity of emotion as the only "all", when it comes to aesthetic experience. Individuals can experience it. On the public level it will only remain as a question of social integration, an agreement upon taste, therefore a problem of either history or market. In the end, each one of us is doomed to cry one's own Stendhalian tears all by oneself.

**Peter Pakesch** What is the role of time in this continuum?

**Pedro Cabrita Reis** Time and/or continuum, perhaps we are talking about the same instance. The problem lies in the infinity of "times" involved in the experience of a single instant and simultaneously in its opponent, the end. The question remains: why can't we consider finiteness for this concept? There seems to be, attached to the common assumption of space as a category, a possible "physicality" of it, allowing us, (when in a more self indulgent mood), to imagine an end, or an interruption of some kind. In the absence of its finiteness how could we have articulated this concept, time? Or is it that we created it, as a charade, just to entertain every deity in every pantheon, while in the magnificent darkness of our minds we are, as a matter of fact, interested in nothing but eternity, also known as the pure and absolute absence of time? But, coming back to your question, the role of time seems to be vanishing thru our scared fingers. And that's why we keep doing art, talking about it while keeping an eye on the clock.

**Peter Pakesch** We are confronted with an endless interrogation which develops into a continuum beyond mere physical existence and goes far beyond such categories.

Something which excites me, being confronted with your way of dealing with "space" is the ambivalent presence of time. Sometimes one sees it as "frozen", sometimes, on the contrary, as "unfolding" within the work. The perception of music or language in its most complex forms would come to my mind. The installation at the Gulbenkian unfolded in my eyes like a novel or a symphony. Although the whole setting

was static, of course, I started to read this space differently. Time and movement became important, themes and repetitions started to sound – visually.

**Pedro Cabrita Reis** *Foundation*, the work you've seen at Gulbenkian, functioned for me somehow as a "meeting point" for many different questions enunciated thru my life and along my work. Perhaps an intermediary *compte-rendu*. I'm interested in an art which demands rigueur and could be understood as an exercise of intelligence and still be retinian. Refusing on one hand the poverty of formalism and on the other the dry arrogance of conceptualism, I believe that nothing is beyond the limits of my interrogations and everything is what I have to try to continue such inquiry. If, in that particular work, you've felt time and movement, it is because you've also noticed at the same time the silence and the stillness of it. Like space, time can't be enunciated as a unity, or as "one thing". In that work I've involved a lot of different times in the process of its construction. Instead of a novel or a symphony why don't we remember it as an equation to remain unsolved? Endless time and infinite space have always been the core of human interrogations. In art it is the same way.

**Peter Pakesch** Is time endless? Is space infinite?

**Pedro Cabrita Reis** Time and space can perhaps be endless the one, and infinite the other, if we are ready to admit the presence of god as a conceptual reference in our conversation. But, if such an ultimate instance is not a part of our present theoretical horizon, than, we are in deep trouble or, on the contrary, (depending on how you assume your destiny) we have absolute freedom (Individuality? Loneliness?). Endless and infinite, these are words to name the possibility of an in-finitude, (an equation unable to be solved) but, at the same time that they name "it", we are not able to perceive the finitude (dimension?) embraced by both nouns. So where will we be? Can we conceive a name separated from the dimension of its conception? Can we not "know" a "thing" (the dimension of infinity) and yet formulate a (its) name? Or is

there a substance without a word? Can we "explain" (unfold/measure) an aesthetical emotion ...? And if we can, is it something revealed only to us? If not, how do we enunciate it? How would we be able to "tell" this aesthetical emotion to the other if we are not able to realize the endlessness of time?

**Peter Pakesch** Or do we want it to be so, though science tells us something different?

**Pedro Cabrita Reis** Why would we want things to be different from what science tells us? Or do things, in fact, differ from what science tells us? And if they do, what kind of knowledge would bring us beyond the limits of the "known" proposed to us by the scientific discourse? And not being a "method" how does art "know"? And what does it know?

**Peter Pakesch** Isn't it that we just cannot bear it to be acting in closed circuits?

**Pedro Cabrita Reis** I don't think we act in closed circuits. There is an impossibility to actually knowing the instant that will succeed the present instant, which is the same thing as saying the impossibility of enunciating the concept of "end". If we agree upon this, we'll have as well to admit that the perception of an action bears the same impossibility. We are unable to know what we will do next. The "now" is only perceived as "present" as a consequence of its own disappearance. There is no "closed" because we are always moving to a no-where.

**Peter Pakesch** Does art fulfil a desire for the unknown that way?

**Pedro Cabrita Reis** Perhaps not. Art seeks the truth, I believe, and, as an absolute, the truth is not an "un-known".

**Peter Pakesch** Or do we want to compete with science, creating a language in a more formalised way by talking about equations with open ends?

**Pedro Cabrita Reis** There is no possible competition. Science is “worried” about the unknown and seems to be concerned with clarity. Art cannot possibly explain, despite the poor ambitions of some patronizing art, desperately wanting to save us. On the contrary, art brings us into darkness, in search of an “original” (primordial) intelligence, a revelation of an instantaneous absolute knowledge. In this vision from within there isn’t a fragmentation of perception, there are no equations to be solved. It’s not a process, it’s a moment. Now, is it that the truth is “endless”?

**Peter Pakesch** Or is it mathematics interpreted in a very free way?

**Pedro Cabrita Reis** Mathematics has its own beauty. Like poetry which I prefer.

**Peter Pakesch** Or are we moving into a practice with quasi scientific structures and procedures?

**Pedro Cabrita Reis** Some artistic practices seem to develop an unsolvable approach to such patterns. I’m totally uninterested in that attitude, which is seemingly just another corollary of an overall political correctness. The intelligence of art does not come from an enunciation of an “unknown”, (an economy of power?) but from the intuition of truth (a gnosis of beauty?). Again, I would prefer to see with my eyes closed.

- “...Mit geschlossenen Augen”: gesprach mit Pedro Cabrita Reis = “...With my eyes closed”: conversation with Pedro Cabrita Reis.

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