

Gilberto Zorio, an interview

JOLE DE SANNA

Your work proceeds along a six-year course, from 1966 to 1972.

What is its internal logic, how did it develop?

The theme of my work is energy understood both in the physical and in the mental sense. My works are, in themselves, energy because they are always works that live or works in action or works that time will alter. In my first works this energy is expressed in a very physical manner, at a level of chemical reaction, owing to which the work is not completed but goes on living by itself, while I become the spectator both of its own reactions and of the reactions of the public. And this is the meaning of the concept of process in my works.

Are the materials you choose so carefully of any interest to you per se or are they exclusively subordinated to the realization of the idea?

The starting point of the work is the idea, then comes gradually the realization which must be totally congruent with the idea. The materials are important merely because I try to maintain the utmost consistency between reality and the idea. I am interested in a work that will be stimulating for as long as it exists, that will stimulate me until it is destroyed. I have obviously tried to free all these materials from their technological function. For example, my work with the lights confronted with each other on the floor was produced in order to restore light to its real function which is not to illuminate a table or a room. Light, here, is once again heat, a source of

energy, and it is light against more light. I conceived this work as a small competition with the sun.

Does this imply a critical attitude towards technology in general?

The critical attitude towards technology is implicit; however, I had no intention of elaborating a criticism of the technological apparatus. I used those materials simply because I needed them, as opposed to their real function. Whereas, before, there was a certain tough realism in my choice of materials, many of which contained a certain tactile dangerousness or an unpleasant smell, etc., now it seems to me that my work is purer as regards the materials. My real concern is energy in which I feel involved personally and in which I wish to involve the spectator, too, with his unbroken vitality.

It is possible to notice, in your work, the presence of psychological tensions, as in the 'reeds', if not of anxiety, as in the 'chair'. In these cases yours is not the attitude of a detached promoter of energy processes but it appears charged with allusions and tensions.

It's true, I believe this is due to the fact that in my work energy is not just an abstract notion, nor a purely physical one, but it refers to a totally human dimension, to an anthropological dimension, to situations that are part of history and not to ideal facts. Besides, I make use of the word 'hate' which, semantically, is charged with psychic strata. I resort to the clenched fist, an image which from an iconographic point of view is redundant with a great deal of meanings.

Is this reverting to an anthropological dimension, through words, gestures or

images charged with symbols, indicative of a narrative purpose, or of a mental scenography, within your activity?

No, not at the beginning. If any, this mental scenography takes place later. It is obvious that this scenical apparatus refers directly to an anthropological and, therefore, historical energy, even though this is not the prime purpose.

What about similar situations in later works?

There is a primary moment when I am concerned with the technical, physical or chemical elements I am going to use. Then comes the elaboration of situation which may even seem theatrical as, for example, in two recent works like *Hate* and *Phosphorescent Fist*. These two works, apparently different, are for me very similar because I feel involved in them: the former because it is untouchable, the later because it must be worn. The tension in *Hate* originates from the absolute search for an indeterminate target. On the contrary, as regards the *Fist*, the target is the fist itself but one cannot get near it and know it thoroughly, the work functions by itself and one is rejected upon entering its space. Moreover, in the *Fist* several elements come into play that I would hesitate to term theatrical; the two lamps which illuminate it emphasize its waxworks aspect whereas the contrary occurs when - with the lights out - the fist shows it possesses a light of its own. When the lights are out, the fist is revealed through its own memory, as if becoming intelligence, a living element. And there is no theatrical intention in *Radical Fluidity*, either. I tried to protract a mental act, to extend it physically beyond the reach of my body. At the same time, I tried to slacken the action, to make it heavy in spite of the idea of fluidity. Having to labour in order to achieve a result, as is the case here with the impression left on my own skin, is very important. Thus, the radicality of my idea is expressed on my body. *Taken as a whole, your activity is quite close to the activity of other Italian artists. Which do you feel closer to and what are the relations between you?*

I have known Anselmo, Pistoletto, Penone and Kounellis since 1966. I can identify myself with some of Anselmo's works, his work has gradually become purer, more abstract. His are extremely rarefied, sharp but also extremely heavy works because they imply a tremendous mental tangibility.

Does the energy present in your works have also a cognitive function? And does this knowledge concern only art or something else outside of art?

I believe these works provide a knowledge which may, of course, fall within the history of art because I operate in a cultural context called art. I could not say I am outside of art without being mistaken. What with culture, induction and a personal necessity, I found myself in the art field but the result is unchanged. I am no longer concerned about whether this is art or not, it is a work set in a context called art. My problem is not to make art or stay away from art, I merely do things which, subsequently and even against my will, are apprehended through the media which lead towards art history.

Transl. Daniella Dangoor