

## **Agnetti: use and notion of time**

Vincenzo Agnetti's work «Time action», which is reproduced in the following pages, develops a particular aspect of the idea of Time that has always played an important role in his art. Seven images (the last one is an absence) visualize the perfect coincidence between the work project and its result, between what is read and what is brought about by the action of making holes, cutting and forgetting. This particular action of time may be defined as Information and is put into effect here as «total information» on the individual images and their sequence. We are in fact informed, both conceptually and visually, on the whole set of points that make up the line of a story — «Time action» is a more extensive story — without any connection or detail having been omitted.

The fact that Time is becoming outstandingly important in contemporary art has been opportunely highlighted by Gillo Dorfles (1). In a penetrating essay he analyzes the progressively «temporal» nature of the visual and spatial arts in their latest trends — poor art, programmed art, land art, conceptual art, body art, etc. Dorfles discusses a multiform symbology of time and pauses to explain the «predictability» (foretelling the future but also inferring the future from the past) and the «retropredictability» (explanation of the past) of a given event, to conclude that: «Time — and hence duration, obsolescence, consumption, wear-and-tear and entropy — amount to nothing short of a constant in art (and not only art) activity».

A further, more closely documented analysis of everything that falls under the heading of Time in art today has been made by Margarethe Jochimsen, according to whom: «it is clear that the progressive dematerialization of art, or the tendency to seize and reveal phenomena that cannot be visualized, is slowly promoting "time" from a constituent and structural medium to an actual topic of artists' discussions» (2).

Agnetti's use of the category «time» still pertains to visualization, just as Pistoletto visualized a purely phenomenal time in his mirror paintings; and just as Paolini, in his «Preliminary note on time», made the notion of time coincide with the actual time taken to write down that note on a piece of paper. Tautology, that particular figure of logic, is often utilized. Or else the artist tries to identify the immobilized symbols of a work with the same time action that created the symbols themselves, as in «Time action»,

where the work-instant contained by a work-duration are symbolized now by four corners cut off, now by a series of holes. This physical time is materialized in the space of a sheet of paper, and is followed up by the mind-time of work «forgotten by heart».

Agnetti has stated what his idea of time is, through «Tempus Mentis»: on a surface is drawn a meridian which visualizes the words written below it, «Time is the course of space and space the deposition of time.» But the use which Agnetti makes of time is much more objective and determinant. In numerous works and texts he refers to the past, present and future, in terms of historical time, political and cultural action, and art ideology criticism. Example:

6. *The present can only be violated by a conceptual equilibrium: an unsteady balance between the past and the future, oblivion and discovery.*
7. *Violation of the present means stretching art (for example) to areas which are outside the concept of art. (3)*

Agnetti has overtaken the notion of avant-garde as time occupied by mere formal transgression. It will have been noticed that the images in «Time action», at any rate the first ones, are re-copies of the image in Fontana's art, of his cuts and holes. But whereas Fontana's Spatialism implied an overcoming of art as spatiality, Agnetti now clearly explains the analysis of a particular aspect of time: information. Not space, but time, is enunciated in this work. It is a successful attempt to expound a story without skipping even a single link in it.

The avant-garde seems to have been the historical form in which the idea of Time has advanced in the contemporary visual arts. Now that the notion of avant-garde has permanently fallen into decay, the notion of Time is proving, without any disguises, to be its chief heir.

T.T.

(1) Gillo Dorfles, *Il simbolismo del tempo nell'arte*, in «Archivio di Filosofia», Roma, 1973.

(2) Margarethe Jochimsen, *Zeit (Ein Aspekt in der aktuellen Kunst)*, in «Magazin Kunst», n. 49, 1973.

(3) Vincenzo Agnetti, *Trasduzione e subvalore*, in «Data», n. 2, 1972.