

NOTE FOR THE READER : This essay is only a temporary version written some years ago; at the moment is being reviewed by the author

THE TIME OF THE PROCESS IN THE ART¹

By Sara Marilungo

In this essay I will compare various types of “temporalization”² in the art proposed by some authors of the XX century, integrating them, where necessary, with new “forms” of time emerged in the latest artistic movements. These forms of time, as we will see, concern also the arts of the past. In fact, I want to show how, in the light of the changes occurred in the art of the XX century, it emerges the need for a new perspective on the category of time.

During the XX century the art underwent a deep and gradual change that involved all the art fields, from painting to sculpture, from cinema to the new forms of multimedia art.

The change concerned all the aspects of the work, from the materials used to the relationship between the artist and his/her work, from the operative programs to the techniques, from the final product to the relationship between the latter and its public and, above all, the conception itself of the work of art, which has broadened up to include objects, handworks and creations with several characteristics.

In particular it emerged a shift of the attention from the work considered as a product of the artistic process, understood as a private practice of the artist aimed only at the final result, to the process itself conceived as the work in its formative “self-making” process.³ Therefore, the art of the last century moved along the poetics of the “work-in-progress” and the “open-work”.

The concept of “work in progress”, appeared first in Joyce’s *Ulysses* (1921) and consolidated afterwards in his unfinished work *Finnegans Wake* (1939)⁴, lends itself to describe an amount of works of art that don’t aim to a definitive form, rather to a material complex which encompasses the movement as a continuous renewal⁵ of the work itself. Though keeping its identity, the work of art moulds itself in relation to several contingent factors, from the intervention of the artist to the interventions of the environment and the public.

The concept of “work in progress” is directly connected to Morris’ idea of “anti-form”,⁶ according to which the struggle against a definite form develops into performances and happenings “subdued to the whim of chance and destined not to materialize into any object”.⁷

The interest moves towards procedures and results that elude uniqueness and clearness, regularity and stability, in favour of open, changeable and uncertain situations. The underlying aptitude aims to a materialization of sculpture intended as an impenetrable form – a closed and stable volume – and to the overcoming of the idea of an object complete in itself... the functional use of materials is supplanted

¹ The titles of the books are kept in the language used in the Italian version of the essay. Italian quotation have been personally translated into English.

² I use the term “temporalization” to underline time as an object of experience, which exists only in the presence of a subject. In this way I want to highlight the active role of the subject in the experience of time, which in a certain sense is “moulded” by the subject itself. Notably in the work of art, time can be considered as a “material” that can be used by the artist or by the observer. Massimo Donà maintains: “the fact is that *it’s me that construct the time*. Only me can recognise that it’s eight o’clock, and I can recognise that only because I put myself as a transcendental horizon of temporality, that it is insuperable and last ... Who can own a certain time, and so an age? Only the objects of my experience, because they are always *already temporalized* by the original form of my experience. The form that we define for this reason *temporalizer*” (Massimo Donà, *Joseph Beuys. La vera mimesi* (Cinisello Balsamo: Silvana, 2004), 44.

³ Luigi Pareyson, *Estetica. Teoria della formatività* (Bologna: Zanichelli, 1960), 11.

⁴ Denys Riout, *L’arte del ventesimo secolo. Protagonisti, temi, correnti* (Torino: Einaudi, 2002), 162; Umberto Eco, *Opera aperta* (Milano: Bompiani, 1967), 35.

⁵ Eco, 38.

⁶ Robert Morris, 1968, quoted in Riout, 270.

⁷ Riout, 270.

by a free manipulation and experimentation of the matter and of its possibilities of interaction with the instability and the mutability of contingent factors (environment, force of gravity, light, decay). The pre-eminence of the process on the product leads to unstable situations, where the work is identified as a possible “episode” of a potentially unlimited process.⁸

In fact, one of the implications of this idea of work of art as a process is the change of the conditions of its interpretability.

Luigi Pareyson maintains that the work is the process and “the process is the work on the move, that is the work while trying to adapt to itself”.⁹ If the purpose of the formative activity of art is formativity itself¹⁰ then the work, according to Pareyson

is utterly present in its physical reality and doesn't refer to a significance that transcends it, for its own existence is its significance; it is neither a sign, nor a symbol, or an allusion; it doesn't indicate anything but itself.

It is not about catching the meaning of a physical presence...but to be able to consider the physical presence itself as a meaning.¹¹

The path that brings art to integrate (not to represent) real movement and real time in the process of formation appears tortuous, fragmentary and many-sided, nonetheless the reality of contemporary works of art comes out of the integration of numerous factors that represent at the same time an evolution and a break with the art of the past. An evolution because time and movement, as we'll see, are not and were not solely distinctive categories of the so called “temporal” arts, but they are present also in the plastic arts, considered, according to the classic distinction, “spatial arts”.

At the same time however the role played by these factors in contemporary arts is, with no doubts, different from their function in the plastic arts of the past, due to the shift occurred from representing to “showing” (physical presence of the work intended as its significance).

The following passage from *Nuovi realismi e pop art[s]* by Catherine Grenier gives an example of their decisive role in the various movements of the twentieth century:

in France, the integration of the movement, which is at the same time the association of real time in the art and the interaction between the work and the world, is an important factor for the *nouveaux réalistes*, in addition to the achievement of a physical and social dimension of the process of creation.

This integration of the movement – to which it follows the integration of sound, and afterwards the one of the animated image – in the art, and the fact of putting to the fore the physical and social procedure of the artist which presides over the realization of the work, are factors of a rapprochement between European and American artists in the very early '60s.¹²

Actually, time is an essential factor of the work considered in the process of its realization..

As a category related to the work of art, time has always played a very important role.

However, the theoretical reflection on time in the art has sometimes been fragmentary, incomplete or simply secondary, preferring the analyses of factors such as space or movement, however connected to it.

In these pages I intend to focus attention on a temporality that is neither just represented in the iconic content of the figure, nor just intended as duration of the work taken as a physical object, as it has often been considered, rather to time as essential factor of the work intended as a process.

⁸ Maddalena Disch, “Process Art e Arte Povera” , AA.VV., *Arte contemporanea. Le ricerche internazionali dalla fine degli anni '50 a oggi* (Milano: Mondadori Electa, 2005), 126.

⁹ Pareyson, 102.

¹⁰ “In the art the person doesn't need to form in order to think or act, but he/she forms only in order to form”.

“The artistic operation is a process of invention and production exercised not to realize speculative or practical works or other types of works, but just for itself; forming to forming, to form pursuing only shape in itself: art is pure formativity” (Pareyson, 11).

¹¹ Pareyson, 245-246.

¹² Cathrine Grenier, “Nuovi Realismi e pop art(s)” , AA.VV., *Arte contemporanea. Le ricerche internazionali dalla fine degli anni '50 a oggi*, 21-22.

It is common knowledge that in nature time and space manifest themselves jointly and that every representation of the world can only be a spatio-temporal representation of it; however omissions or partial analysis of the temporal category of the work are essentially due to the rather posthumous abandon of Lessing's distinction between "space arts" and "time arts".

Between 1924 and 1925, in the full fervour of the international and Russian vanguards and influenced by the new discoveries of modern science, Pavel Florenskij wrote *Time and space in art*. In this book Florenskij reaches far-seeing considerations about the work of art, which anticipate some aspects of the subsequent developments of the philosophical reflection on art.

First of all it stands out the idea of a work of art where the fulfilment of the artist's idea depends on the space and on the materials on which the artist intervenes. The author states that in the work there is a "lack of correspondence of the productive conditions with that aim that determines the shape", from which "it derives the indetermination of two spaces, overlapped one another: the one intentionally projected, though not realized, the other realized, but against the intentions".¹³

Moreover, he distinguishes two principles operating in the work (which seem to anticipate Gombrich's schema-and-correction idea, discussed in *Arte e illusione. Studio sulla psicologia della rappresentazione pittorica*).

The first one, the *composition*, it is the "scheme of the space unity of the work". The composition is the project, the work which is not embodied yet, the artist's intention; it's the "fundamental scheme on the basis of which a certain work is structured", the structure of the work itself.

The second one, the *construction*, is "what reality says about itself through the work", it is the behaviour of the elements of reality itself, it is the structure of reality.

Construction is what reality wants from the work, composition is what the artist wants from its work.¹⁴

With these words Florenskij already recognizes that the distance between what the artist projects (the scheme) and how reality wants to be represented (the adjustment of the scheme to reality – correction) bridges in the final artistic product after that the two principles confront each other within the productive process of the work. Gombrich in *Arte e illusione* describes this process stating that the artist, before beginning to paint, owns a scheme, a stereotypic formula that is the image in his mind, an approximate idea which he is about to confront with the reality and which he will try to modify according to the characteristics of the real object that he wants to reproduce, thus "adjusting" the scheme. With regard to contemporary art (but the technique was often used also in the past), the addition of *random* marks to the figure, provide the artists with a stimulus, a pretext for a different figure, more faithful to the artist's inner world than to the real one, where he is compelled to slowly "adapt the subsequent mark to the effect observed in the previous one".¹⁵

However, with Florenskij, it is still early for the productive process to be considered as a decisive part of the work itself, or, in other words, to consider the final work only as a stage, the last one, of the process.¹⁶

Despite the importance of some intuitions¹⁷, Florenskij considers the work of art as an artistic "product", although the final result of an elaborate procedure; in this sense his consideration of time remains still circumscribed to a static conception of the work.

He points out above all the mistake of the distinction between time arts and space arts, both because time and space "can't be divided... they always appear jointly"¹⁸ and because in the arts:

¹³ Pavel Florenskij, *Lo spazio e il tempo nell'arte* (Milano: Adelphi, 1995), 63.

¹⁴ Florenskij, 90.

¹⁵ Ernst H Gombrich, *Arte e illusione. Studio sulla psicologia della rappresentazione pittorica* (Einaudi: Torino, 1965), 434.

¹⁶ Pareyson, 80.

¹⁷ In fact, the author writes about the process and its stages: "the beginning of a process represents the entire process. That is true. But it is necessary to keep in mind the symbolic character of this representation and the absolute falsity of the simple substitution of the image on the whole with what represents it, be this even the most substantial of its time sections." (Florenskij, 145).

There isn't any insurmountable barrier between figurative arts, which are erroneously taken for space arts, and music, in its several aspects, which is taken as the art of pure temporality.¹⁹

Indeed, such a distinction doesn't take into account for example the fact that as the music score doesn't exist as proper music if it is not performed in an "inner" or "instrumental" reading, in the same way the figurative work of art reveals itself to the observer only after a process of perception. In fact, we will see that what I will call the "time of the performance" of the work it is a basic moment of the work itself.²⁰

Likewise, Giovanni Piana in *La notte dei lampi* notices that it is a mistake, on the contrary, to exclude spatiality from issues pertaining to sound, given that "the image of sound irradiation from the object refers to the spread of sound in the depth of space".²¹

Souriau too, in the essay *Time in the Plastic Arts* points out that it is dangerous to differentiate "space arts" (among which he numbers drawing, painting, sculpture, architecture and minor arts) from "time arts" (music, poetry, dance and cinema), which has often led to rule out time dimension from plastic arts.

Gillo Dorfles, in the essay *Il simbolismo del tempo nell'arte*²², shares the same opinion with the mentioned authors, specifying also that if the distinction between space arts and time arts still finds a narrow rationale when applied to the iconic content of painting, sculpture and architecture, it is of little value if we consider visual arts in general in their incorporating both the creative moment (the one that here we call the "time of the process") and the moment of fruition of the work ("time of the performance").²³

Dorfles notices also the new role that time plays in contemporary arts. The "symbolology of time" doesn't refer anymore to forms that clearly imply an iconic time factor, such as the static figures of painting, but other aspects of the artistic operation emerged in the 29th century art. Thus, he says

it will be a "symbol of time" alike both the representation of the dial of a clock and the gesture of cutting a canvas... whose imprint is kept by the canvas and only in this sense it is "symbolic" of the gesture itself.²⁴

Florenskij distinguishes two types of temporalization of the work: the time of the work as a physical object, that is the duration of its existence, and the time of the work as a representation through which the marks dictate a rhythm to the painting, a specific succession that the observer is supposed to follow in order to innerly piece it together. The temporal sequence of the elements is subordinated to the arrangement of them.

The author cites as example the work *The soul of the people* by Michail Nesterov, where different ages of the Russian people's history are simultaneously represented in a spatial sequence in the painting.

Furthermore, the temporal coordinate in the work is strictly connected to the representation of the movement, as noticed also by Souriau and Pierantoni; this means that the movement doesn't exist out of time, rather in reality movement is the participation of the phenomena to time.²⁵

Agreeing with Florenskij, Souriau in *Time in the plastic arts* proposes a classification of the types of

¹⁸ Florenskij, 319.

¹⁹ Florenskij, 162.

²⁰ I want to underline that the "time of the performance" in the work doesn't imply a manifestly active attitude, as it could be the one of the performer of a music score. Even a simple listener or observer has an active role, since he actually "performs" the work. La Matina in *Cronosensitività* calls "ordination of the Signifier" the convergence of the interpreter and the listener in the process of oral communication toward the creation of a text, which doesn't exist before the communicative interaction, but originates with it. (cf. Marcello La Matina, "La presenza dell'altro", *Cronosensitività. Una teoria per lo studio filosofico dei linguaggi* (Roma: Carocci, 2004), 163-201). As regard to this he quotes Paul Zumthos' words, who writes: "we could distinguish two roles in the listener: the recipient and the co-author. This splitting concerns the nature itself of interpersonal communication" (La Matina, 178).

²¹ Giovanni Piana, *La notte dei lampi. Quattro saggi sulla filosofia dell'immaginazione*, I ed. (Milano: Guerini e Associati, 1988), digital version 2000, <http://filosofia.dipafilo.unimi.it/~piana/colori/cls0000.htm>, section 27, "Tematica temporale".

²² Gillo Dorfles, "Il simbolismo del tempo nell'arte", AA.VV., *Il simbolismo del tempo. Studi di filosofia dell'arte* (Padova: Cedam - Casa Editrice Dott. Antonio Dilani, 1973), 103-117.

²³ Dorfles, 105.

²⁴ Dorfles, 104.

²⁵ Florenskij, 325.

temporalization in the arts. We will try to integrate Souriau's analysis, in the light of the latest developments of the art of the nineteenth century, with what I call the "time of the process", that is the "real time" of the work.

Souriau distinguishes, in the plastic arts, between a *time of contemplation* and an *intrinsic time* of the work of art. The time of contemplation is the time spent by the observer to observe the work. It is what I called the "time of the performance" of the work. Both in the case of a painting, and mostly for a statue or a cathedral the time required for a complete appreciation of the work is always wider than a fleeting single glance.

Hochberg in his essay *La rappresentazione di cose e persone* maintains that

when we read a typewritten line, the action depends on the movement of the eyes and the same thing happens when we watch a painting. Through these subsequent glances we have to construct an integrated scheme that contains the whole scene²⁶

that is, a cognitive map which organizes the configuration of the painting. In the same way the complete appreciation of a statue requires the observer's movement around it.

The intrinsic time of the work is what I call the "time of the representation", the time pertaining to the composition itself, of which Souriau states that

It is no longer a question of simple *psychological* time of contemplation, but of an artistic time inherent in the texture itself of a picture of a statue... in their aesthetic arrangement.²⁷

For example, in a novel there are three types of time: the order in which the narration is unfolded, the order in which the events are supposed to follow each other and the time it takes to read it.

In Poussin's painting *Shepherds in Arcadia* the intrinsic time is evoked by the ages of the people in the painting, by the presence of the "tomb recalling those who lived formerly" and by the presence of death, "whose shadow falls upon love and present happiness".²⁸

Souriau proposes also a comparison between the time of the paintings and musical time in its three chief classifications: a) its dimensional extent, b) its structure notably in the form of rhythm, c) its agogic (tempo or speed) variations.

While in music the time extension is set by the duration of the piece, in painting the time of contemplation varies. The organization of the intrinsic time of the painting is *stellar* and *diffluent*:

the time of the work radiates... around the prerogative moment represented. The latter makes a structural center from which the mind moves backward to the past and forward to the future.²⁹

It is the same for the movements that develops in the mind of the observer originating from the depicted moment:

usually the representation fixes the moment of maximum extension or tension; being an intermediate point, it allows to imagine the previous and subsequent points of the movement. The limbs lean out in the effort, the arms grow longer in astonishment or affection, the mouths are wide open. It is the mind that integrates the represented phase with the previous or following ones.³⁰

Movement, therefore time, in the perception of the painting is a mental fact. Dorfles calls these movements of the mind in the time of the work, which allow to guess the past and foretell the future, with the

²⁶ Julian Hochberg, "La rappresentazione di cose e persone", Gombrich/Hochberg/Black, *Arte, percezione e realtà. Come pensiamo le immagini* (Torino: Einaudi, 1992), 72.

²⁷ Etienne Souriau, "Time the in plastic arts", *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 7 (1949), 294, digital version in www.jstor.org, 296-297.

²⁸ Souriau, 299.

²⁹ Souriau, 301.

³⁰ Cesare Segre, *La pelle di San Bartolomeo. Discorso e tempo dell'arte* (Torino: Einaudi, 2003), 45.

terms *retrodictability* and *predictability*.³¹ An example reported by Souriau is the *Presentation of the Virgin in the Temple* (1552-1553) by Tintoretto. Maria is half-way up the stairs; the slow movement of stepping up the stairs is suggested by the detail of the wide tread of the stairs. The observer feels that she has just climbed three steps and accompanies her in thought to the threshold.³²

As regards to rhythm in plastic arts, the author suggests to use the term “rhythm” with parsimony, because rhythm in the strict sense of the world means

an organization of a continuous succession through the cycling repetition of the same basic scheme³³

that within plastic arts can only be found in decoration and architecture.³⁴
In general however

art tends, by the choice of a prerogative moment, to suggest a kind of mental equivalent to rhythm, by the permanence of this prerogative moment, rather than to demand that the mind actually travel the complete rhythmic cycle.³⁵

Contemporary painting, in particular with movements such as the Action Painting, often refers to the rhythmic component, in most cases distant from the definition of rhythm as a cycling repetition of the same basic scheme. For example in the Action Painting the rhythm belongs both to the painting and also to the gesture of producing it. The painting is the product of a rhythmical dance that has the same importance of the painting produced. Rosenberg, art critic who formulated the concept of Action Painting

Used to define painting as action and to regard it much more important than the final outcome, that is the painting.³⁶

In Pollock’s painting *Gothic* (1944):

the observer thinks to locate shapes of hands and feet that however, soon after, appear not very plausible or insignificant. It remains firm the sense of the dance, of the body that follows the rhythm... it is a simultaneous vibration of the whole surface of the painting.³⁷

Deleuze, in his book *Francis Bacon. Logica della sensazione*, talks about an inner rhythm in the artist’s paintings, pertaining the movements of the elements at the base of his painting: a first movement which goes from the Structure to the Figure; a tension, a second movement which goes from the Figure to the material Structure (“the Figure shrinks or dilates in order to go through a hole or into the mirror”³⁸). The rhythm is given by the coexistence of the movements in the painting:

everything splits up into systole and diastole spread at every level. The systole which shrinks the body, and goes from the structure to the Figure; the diastole which relaxes and disperses it, and goes from the Figure to the Structure. So there is a diastole in the first movement, when the body spreads in order to shrink better; and a systole in the second movement, when the body shrinks to escape.³⁹

³¹ Dorfler, 110.

³² Souriau, 301.

³³ Souriau, 303.

³⁴ I add to these arts the pictorial movements of the optical art, visual art and programmed art where there can be forms of repetition that suggest rhythmical visual patterns, similar to the decoration (cf. “Pratiche artistiche in rete”, AA.VV., *Arte contemporanea. Le ricerche internazionali dalla fine degli anni '50 a oggi*, 46-69; and “Arte visuale, op art, arte programmata e cinetica – olografia - luce-ambiente, neon, laser”, Lara-Vinca Masini, *L'arte del Novecento. Dall'Espressionismo al multimediale* (Roma: Gruppo Editoriale L'Espresso, 2003), Vol. 10, 444-515).

³⁵ Souriau, 304.

³⁶ Leonhard Emmerling, *Pollock* (Modena: Inter Logos, 2004), 48.

³⁷ Emmerling, 54.

³⁸ Gilles Deleuze, *Francis Bacon. Logica della sensazione* (Macerata: Quodlibet, 1995), 67.

³⁹ Deleuze, 77.

Deleuze detects in Bacon's painting numerous types of rhythm, given by the interaction of powers and tensions within the painting, asserting also the existence of out-and-out "rhythmical characters" : "rhythm would become Figure itself, would be the Figure".⁴⁰ In this type of painting the space of the painting which separates a body from another is not thought anymore as

represented as it is: motionless and empty ... It's not anymore a Newtonian container of events but a set and a plot of power lines. Of vectors and multiple efforts.⁴¹

From this point of view, rhythm is not the rhythm in a narrow, musical sense of the term, that is the cycling repetition of the same basic scheme, rather the presence of inner tensions in the painting which evoke a non-linear movement within it.

The third type of time, *tempo*, in music is expressed by indications such as *adagio*, *andante*, *presto* etc.⁴² Souriau points out how in painting there are:

an impression of slow time, very slow, to the point of immobility almost (as depicted in works such as the *St. Jerome in his Cell* by Dürer, or *The song of love* by Burne-Jones, or *Mourning* by Saint-Gadens) or an impression of moderately rapid, truly agitated or fantastically violent movement, as demonstrated in these three stages by *The Spring* of Botticelli, *The Rape of the Daughters of Leucippus*, by Rubens, and *The Horse Frightened by the Storm* by Delacroix.⁴³

As in music we don't have an exact count of the number of notes per second which enables to indicate the tempo of the movement, in the same way in painting, sculpture or architecture there aren't objective standards that confirm such impressions.

The types of temporalization analyzed so far concern the work meant as a product.

The introduction of real time and movement in the art of the nineteenth century constitutes an evolution in respect to the past in the sense that time and movement represented *in* the work become time and movement *of* the work itself. An example of this development of the reproduction of movement is given by the representation of the motion of a circle wheeling around its centre, as described by Ruggero Pierantoni in *Forma Fluens*.

Let's start from Velázquez's painting *Le filatrici* (1657):

if there's enough speed to cause a perceptive fusion of different points then the disc (or the wheel) puts on a particular optical quality: it becomes transparent. It appears filled with an unsubstantial and fleeting matter.⁴⁴

In *Le Filatrici* the painter represents the turning movement of the wool-winder through the "phenomenic category of transparency"⁴⁵, representing ultimately

the visual phenomenology of a wool-winder in quick rotation. It's like if he doesn't wonder or doesn't try to understand the real nature of the wheel rather he just aimed to give pictorial reality to the complex of the luminous stimuli that strike him.⁴⁶

He doesn't represent the object in itself (what in experimental psychology is called the distal stimulus) but its image projected on the retina (proximal stimulus).⁴⁷ This work represents an extraordinary anticipation of what will be the mental model of motion in the pictorial works at the beginning of the

⁴⁰ Deleuze, 136.

⁴¹ Ruggero Pierantoni, *Forma fluens. Il movimento e la sua rappresentazione nella scienza, nell'arte e nella tecnica* (Torino: Bollati Boringhieri, 1987), 516.

⁴² Souriau, 305.

⁴³ Souriau, 305.

⁴⁴ Pierantoni, 310.

⁴⁵ Pierantoni, 317.

⁴⁶ Pierantoni, 315.

⁴⁷ Pierantoni, 314.

nineteenth century, that is the transparency.⁴⁸

On the other hand, in painting, the full understanding of the necessity of a conscious approach to real movement and to the perception of it by the observer, was the basic program of Futurism, an artistic movement that made of the constant research on the representation of the movement its own flag.⁴⁹

Giacomo Balla for example pursued this goal through the representation in a subsequent sequence of the movement of a body on a plane, which is the graphic reproduction of the perceptive process of the retinal persistence of the image. In *Girl running on the balcony* (1912) the figure of the girl is multiplied and decomposed so that each figure let shine the other through in a succession, as if it was a sequence of overlapped frames. The representation of the motion by the multiplication in temporal subsequent moments of the same object was already used in previous ages. However this depiction represents a further “hypothesis on the nature of visual perception of the motion”. The decomposition of the figure in “unsuppressible units, in real irreducible quanta of consciousness” seems to question the persistence of the identity over time.⁵⁰ Therefore, in this hypothesis of the perception of the motion there isn’t just the repetition of the same subject and the use of transparency, but the fragments of the decomposed chromatic units don’t belong neither to one nor to the other figure, instead they belong to the perception by the observer.⁵¹

In the same period the representation of time and motion in their psychological dimension⁵² spread also in sculpture. Pierantoni reports the example of Boccioni’s *Unique forms of continuity in space* where the *Forms*

are the representation of a running man’s inner intuition of a psychological duration (Jullian,1979). It’s like if he could see himself from outside and could contemplate himself in the action of running and had tried to depict all his neurological “protrusions”.⁵³

To return to the motion of a circle that turns around, the revolution in the way of “representing” this movement goes through Duchamp’s anti-traditionalist and debunking art. With his *Ruota di bicicletta* in 1913, a work made of a bicycle wheel installed on a stool, he

brought to an end the research on the representation of the movement... Whoever wants to see the movement come here and make it turn for real: ad nauseam... Here the conclusion is really final: the wheel can only rotate.⁵⁴

The wheel doesn’t represent the movement, it doesn’t “stay for” the movement. The wheel that turns literally exemplifies the movement, it’s a sample of it.⁵⁵ Subsequently, between 1919 and 1920 with Tatlin, Nam Gabo, Pevzner, there will be an out and out “kinetic sculpture”.⁵⁶

In the end, to complete this short phenomenology of the wheel, I would like to cite the work *The big wheel* (1981) by Chris Burden, contemporary sculptor and author of several performances. In this work an iron flywheel with a diameter of 2,45 m rotates continually with proper motion, without the intervention of

⁴⁸ Pierantoni, 510.

⁴⁹ It’s written in the Futurist Manifesto: “The gesture, for us, won’t be anymore a movement stopped from the universal dynamism: it will definitely be the dynamic sensation eternalized as such. Everything moves, runs, changes rapidly. A figure is never stable before us, but it appears and disappears incessantly. Because of the persistence of the image in the retina, things in movement multiply, lose their shapes coming one after the other, like vibrations, in the space they move in. Therefore a running horse doesn’t have four legs: he owns 20 of them and their movements are triangular.” And also: “The sixteen people around you in a moving tram, are one, ten, four, three; they stand still and move; come and go, bounce on the street devoured by a spot of sun, then they go back to their seats, persistent symbols of the universal vibration.” (Masini, Vol. 2, 309)

⁵⁰ Pierantoni, 511.

⁵¹ Pierantoni, 512.

⁵² Bergson discerned «two types of “time”: an objective and computable time and an inner time that he called “duration” ». (Pierantoni, 524).

⁵³ Pierantoni, 525.

⁵⁴ Pierantoni, 539.

⁵⁵ As regards to the concepts of sample and exemplification cf. Nelson Goodman, *I linguaggi dell'arte* (Milano: Il Saggiatore, 2003).

⁵⁶ Masini, Vol. 8, 20.

the spectator but thanks to the contact with the movement of the wheel of a Benelli motor bike, slightly raised from the ground through a backing. The work cannot stop, since the immobility of the wheel would correspond to the incompleteness of the work.

Allan Kaprow, acknowledged as the inventor of the “happening”, identifies Pollock as the one who “destroyed painting”. The artist’s predilection for “huge canvas” let them change into “environments” :⁵⁷

Pollock’s choice of big dimensions has as a consequence the fact that our confrontation with his works becomes an assault, an encompassment.⁵⁸

With the physical movement of the body, Pollock’s dance around the canvas, 20th- century art rediscovers the value of the gesture.⁵⁹ With Duchamp’s work real movement enters the art .

Eco states:

the pictorial informal could be seen as the final ring of a chain of experiments dedicated to the introduction of a certain “movement” into the work.⁶⁰

Kaprow, on the base of his observations, finds himself choosing between keeping on painting or bringing the art beyond painting:

thus Pollock, as far as I can see, left us on the point that we have to begin to worry, without being blinded by that, about the space and the objects of our daily life, our bodies, our clothes, our flats, or, if necessary, the entire 42° Street. Unsatisfied to appeal to our senses, just through the painting, we’ll use the specific characters of sight, hearing, movements, people, smells and touch.⁶¹

Movement, in this new idea of work, is not represented anymore, more or less suggestively, by fixed structure such as the *Nike of Samotracia* or Bourdelle’s *Dance*, nor by more elaborated attempts to represent the movement by Impressionists, Cubists or Futurists. Now the movement involves the structure of the work.

Now the form moves under our eyes, and the work becomes “work in movement”. Its movement composes with the one of the spectator.⁶²

Having overcome this fundamental block, now the work is free to “move” and develop in the time without potentially leaving any trace of its passage, as if it belonged to the “time arts”.

Therefore, I have made clear how, with the new forms of art, the product tends increasingly to be just a stage of the productive process. In the case of Pollock’s paintings for example, but also in the case of many conceptual works of art or of the picture of a concluded happening, retroactive fixation of an event, in Dadaism or in Land Art, in poor art, in kinetic art, in programmed art and in general in all those forms of art where the work is only a residual of the process or is made to be modified, as a non-finite product that can be continuously renewed, or that changes due to the intrinsic nature of the material that it’s made of, the form of time is the form of the process, of the flux, of the becoming without stopping. It’s neither a time represented, nor accidentally destined to bring the work to deterioration against the artist’s will, but it’s a programmed, planned time, in which the work forms itself and changes (the work that consumes itself or is consumed is paradigmatic of the age of consumerism⁶³). It is what here I call the “time of the process”. Even in the case of paintings that reached, so to say, an unchangeable conclusion, the creative process is exemplified in them,

⁵⁷ It can be considered “environment” both the big natural spaces of the Land Art, and more in general, every space or environment where the work takes place. “The concept of environment is closely related to the one of happening, so that we could say that a happening is a dynamic environment and an environment is a frozen happening”. (Josè Pierre, 1975, quoted in AA.VV. *L’arte del Novecento. Dall’Espressionismo al multimediale*, 893).

⁵⁸ Riout, *L’arte del ventesimo secolo. Protagonisti, temi, correnti*, 350.

⁵⁹ Pollock “simply says about the Number 1 that “It’s me while painting” (Pierantoni, 565).

⁶⁰ Eco, 146.

⁶¹ Allan Kaprow, 1958, quoted in Eco, 350.

⁶² Eco, 149.

⁶³ Dorflès, 114. It’s the *Kunstindustrie* of Riegl and Benjamin. (cf. Walter Benjamin, *L’opera d’arte nell’epoca della sua riproducibilità tecnica* (Torino: Einaudi, 1991).

in the apparently casual strokes that, more than hiding the work of the artist, the human intervention aimed to the most realistic composition possible, they show it, testify it. What the work wants to show is the work of the artist, or the intervention of the environment on the work or sometimes the one of the observer.

The nature itself of some contemporary works, such as installations or performances, suggests the fundamental role played by the time factor, given that a performance for example is not a figurative work of art but it resembles more a theatrical performance, from which however it differentiates for the fact of being often completely improvised or, at most, previously planned in a simple plot, or that an installation can include figures, videos, music, narration etc., all arts that imply a consumption or a structuring of time.

However, referring to the work as a process rather than as a final and complete product of a process, therefore motionless, retrospectively allows to bring forward some considerations on the art of the past. When Pareyson talks about the formativity of the work of art, of the “formative character of the entire human work”⁶⁴, he neither refers at all to the new forms of contemporary art, nor his aim is to supply the conditions for the interpretation of some of the latest art movements. He highlights a new way of understanding the poetic of the work of art universally understood, according to which the artist is not an omnipotent manipulator of the matter he works with, but he moulds a material that “resists” to him, pursuing a formative purpose that is suggested by what Pareyson calls the “cue”, that is an a priori project, a scheme. Such a project however can realize and transform itself just through a process, with unpredictable results. «Moulding as a “making” which invents its “way of making” »⁶⁵ means to go on with attempts, aware of the “tension between the formative intent and its matter”.⁶⁶ This way of proceeding belongs to art in general, from its origins until today, and totally undermines the idea that the artistic product can be considered as static and independent from its own process of formation, to which it always refers or rather, I dare to say in the light of Goodmanian art theories, always exemplifies.⁶⁷

The work of art is dynamic because the idea of the work of art itself is dynamic, be it the product of a process or the process itself:

the immobility of the form is not the exclusion of the movement, rather it’s the movement itself that run out placating in the fulfilment of its goal.⁶⁸

The time in William Hogarth’s painting *The death of time* is not only embodied in the jaded figure of a Chronos at death’s door, but it is also exemplified in the single ink and pencil marks, in the presence of the hand of the artist while creating, and in some cases in the preparatory sketches. This awareness let us realize if in the works of the past, for example, an apparently offsite mark is interpretable as mistake or it is functional to the aesthetic outcome of the work.⁶⁹

In the same way the interpretative process, the “time of the performance”, that in a contemporary work that has realized the active role of the observer is often unequivocally part of the work⁷⁰, in works of the past too is neither subsequent to the work nor independent form it, but essential to it:

art is communicative because the form, as a result of a process of formation, is (becomes) stimulus of a process of interpretation; the two things can’t be distinguished.⁷¹

⁶⁴ Pareyson, 7.

⁶⁵ Pareyson, 43.

⁶⁶ Pareyson, 19.

⁶⁷ See footnote 54.

⁶⁸ Pareyson, 80.

⁶⁹ As regards to apparently casual marks, most of the first pre-impressionist and impressionist works, where the artist tried to reproduce the perception of the light instead of the light itself, weren’t understood by the public. The variations in the series of the *Rouen Cathedrals* by Monet for example are representations of the Cathedral in different moments of the day and from different points of view, which means that they move away from a realistic portrait of the object.

⁷⁰ Let us consider for example a particularly recent case, the work of a Canadian artist, Angela Bulloch, titled “Video Sound System” (1997). Here the sound of the projected video starts only when the observer sit on one of the benches in the room, called “sound clash benches”. (AA.VV., *Art Now. Arte e artisti del XXI secolo* (Köln: Taschen, 2005), 48). Similarly, we could cite hundreds of works whose existence depends on the presence of an observer and that don’t “come to life” or “activate themselves” without him/her.

⁷¹ Pareyson, 207.

This form of temporalization was also present in the works of the past but has been ignored considering the final work independently from the preparatory work that preceded it. In the awareness of XX century art, it corresponds to a different function of art in its social contest and to different intentions of the artists. For example, if Egyptian art aimed at “controlling the fleeing of life”, to stop time in fixed structures⁷², contemporary art instead tends to reproduce the flux, the flow of time and things. As an epistemological metaphor⁷³, art discovers the intervention of chaos in the formation of the work, understood as a random element that intervenes in its composition (casual marks) but also as a universal disorder of the matter that the artist has to face and that, in a certain sense, opposes a resistance, contributing to determine the outcomes of the creation.

With regard to this Barbara Catoir, in a book about Bernar Venet, experimental artist born in 1941, writes

there is a dialogue, a proof of strength between the resistance of the rigid material and the artist’s will to create a shape. The material resists. The torsion of a steel bar is not precisely computable, the artist is always compelled to react to the unforeseen event, to reconsider his initial intentions. Sculpture originates in this way, starting from an idea and random factors.⁷⁴

The artist regards himself as a craftsman, who exercises an activity where the will to represent a reality is substituted by the will to express the self through gestures.

There are several examples of contemporary artists who turned to this idea of artistic process. A movement where the works are totally subdued to the action of time, for example, is Land Art, whose artists realize their own production in wide desert spaces, far from the inhabited areas, sometimes inaccessible. A characteristic of the works of Land Art is the photo reproduction, both because of the obvious impossibility to exhibit the works in the museums, and for the conservation over time of the works themselves.

Schwitters’s famous *Merzbau* was started in 1923 and the artist continuously added materials until 1943, when it was destroyed (it was subsequently rebuilt in 1988). The work, that the artist considered a “lifelong” work, ended up to take up the entire artist’s house and, loaded with memoirs, required the visitor to “live” it more than observe it.⁷⁵

In 1966 an exhibition at the Finch College of New York titles *Art in Process: the Visual Development of a Structure*. In 1969 Robert Morris created his *Continuous Project Altered Daily*, where he intervened daily with “clay, bins, electric light bulbs and other materials... and registered the external changes occurred in the work”.⁷⁶

Walter De Maria (1951), Albanian artist, created, in a wide area of New Mexico, a work called *The Lightning Field* (1977). It was made by 400 steel bars inserted in the ground at a distance of 67 meters each other. Observing this work meant to “monitor” it 24/7 for several months, since the bars acted as lighting rods and such an event happened about 3-4 times a year.⁷⁷

Wolfgang Laib (1950), German conceptual artist, in 1975 realized the work *Milk stone*. This work consists of a white marble rectangular stone smoothed inside so that it leaves an edge of about 2 mm. The horizontal surface is filled with milk by the artist, creating a slightly convex edge, thanks to the superficial

⁷² Gombrich, 154.

⁷³ Prigogine in *Le leggi del caos* describes the gradual change of perspectives occurred over the latest decades in natural sciences: “over the latest decades a new concept has become increasingly important: the concept of dynamical instability connected with the one of “chaos”.. the reconsideration of chaos leads to a new consistency, to a science that doesn’t talk only about laws, but also about events, which is not condemned to deny the emerging of the new, which would imply a refusal of its own creative activity”. (Ilya Prigogine, *Le leggi del caos* (Roma-Bari: La terza, 1993), VI).

“Is it possible to counter “being” with “becoming” as we counter “truth” with “illusion”? This was, as it’s known, the position of Plato, and it’s also the one of classical physics, whose ambition was to discover what remains unchangeable beyond the apparent change. The notion of event was excluded from such a description, therefore the ambition to flow into a physics without events has always bumped into great difficulties”. (Prigogine, 7).

⁷⁴ Masini, Vol. 11, 591.

⁷⁵ Riout, 161-162.

⁷⁶ Riout, 269.

⁷⁷ Masini, 518-519.

tension of the milk. The stone needs to be filled from time to time due to the evaporation of the milk, as expressly requested by the artist to the collector, in a sort of ritual that makes nature part of the work (as it was also in many Beuys' and other conceptual artists' works).⁷⁸

Bernar Venet realized gestural paintings with tar, a material that never desiccates but becomes yielding again every summer.⁷⁹

We could cite many other examples of these kinds of works. It is not our task here to give judgments about them, reminding however that such judgements couldn't do without taking into account the social and historical context of any art movement; rather we wanted to highlight the need, for works like these, of the awareness of a changed time dimension of the work.

Finally, on the base of my analysis, I propose an overview of the forms of temporalization of the work, classifying them as follows:

- 1) a *time of the process*, that correspond to the time of creation of the work both in case of finished works, which constitute the final stage of it, and in case of "processual" works, which never reach a concluded product;
- 2) a *time of the representation*, that is the time the work refers to in its iconic content, as in figurative works;
- 3) a *duration* of the work, that corresponds to the time of its physical existence as a material object;
- 4) a *time of the performance*, that is the time employed by the performer (who often corresponds to the observer) in the interaction with the work, no matter in which form he takes part to the work (an observer's mental performance, the physical performance of a score, the activity of interaction-activation of the work, as it is in many contemporary works).

Rhythm, as understood by Souriau, belongs both to the first (i.e. Pollock) and to the second category, in the case of figurative works.

Such a taxonomy is decidedly speculative, for the various types, as we have seen, are easy to overlap. So when the observer is also a co-author of the work, physically acting on it, the time of the performance overlaps with the one of the creative process. In the same way, in the case of works which are subject to programmed decay, the time of the process matches with the physical duration of the work; the time represented in a figurative work is perceived until the observer is able to make a figure out of the work, thus depending on the physical duration of it and so on.

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⁷⁸ Masini, 587.

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