

Vital emptiness

in María Oriza's sculptures

Emptiness is wide. Like the bird
that spontaneously sings and is identified
with the universe.

Chang-tzu

In the Pre-Modern era, everything achieved throughout fire's tame was enclosed by a magic aura belonging to an alchemist nature. Capture fire is not as easy task as smooth water trough the creation of a man-made reservoir at the foot of a wild waterfall. Fire is placed in an honored position due to his allurements and capacity for terrifying (over earth, water and air) in the list of basic elements created by the ancient thinkers to explain universe creation and its order.

For Heraclitus, The Obscure, "All things are an interchange for fire, and fire for all things, just like goods for gold and gold for goods" (1). These interchanges are carried out within the global cycle of fire, which means the alternation between the disappearance of the whole cosmos blazing to be reborn and created again through fire.

Empedocles is another ancient philosopher who attached great importance to fire in his cosmogony and he believed that each one of the four basic elements have features of eternal and unalterable being, also they are the roots of everything. In addition, he believed cosmic forces of love and strife play as an engine to aggregate or disaggregate these elements.

According to Empedocles the aim of the physic it's just an exercise of arbitrary and full actions over things using magical means; such magical power of the potter capable of combine "shine" Zeus with "wet nurse" Hera to craft at the highest level of "love" out of fire a perfect ceramic. Regardless the artistic language used in the creation of shapes (abstracts, figuratives, expressionists, minimalist...) all the sculptures crafted by ceramics technique are outstanding of the rest due to its mystery reminiscence of love that have inside them, just after having been submitted to the

magical action of fire. When artists craft their sculptures it seems that they might have obeyed an imperious voice as the one that had listened Empedocles before he plunged into the crater of Volcano Etna to become a divine entity. To open the doors of an oven to take the pieces which have been exposed to the power of fire always provokes the same surprise to the artist just like the transformation of Empedocles' body into a pair of bronze sandals.

In the Chinese cosmology the combinatory action of this love is able to transform multiplicity into a unity, so it is the vital breath caused by the empty space dividing yin and yang. Probably that is the reason why emptiness is so significant in María Oriza's sculptures, since her creative action is rooted in Taoism tradition and its meaning of the emptiness: "a man's heart could be the rule or the mirror of himself and the world, thus breeding emptiness and identifying pivotal emptiness, human beings are placed at the beginning of the images and shapes. Emptiness captures the rhythm, space and time and it controls the rule of transformation" (2).

A single drop of clay allows to craft a glass, according to Lao-Tzu, but the empty space makes the glass useful. In María Oriza's sculptures we can appreciate this subtle play between the physical identity of an object with a concrete shape and its truly function throughout emptiness: it is not just its "use" it's to delight with a concrete aesthetic created by the artist. Moreover, this play is an attempt of the artist of understanding the world and the emptiness through the artistic creation. Regarding Eduardo Chillida, Ángel Valente says enclosing full emptiness "places the artist and us in a point where creation is achieved, and in its achievement, what has been created, fade so that the world continue to be possible, that is to say, to perpetuate the possibility of creativity" (3). Furthermore, Martin Heidegger reflected about the meaning of emptiness in Chillidas' works, and explains "creating emptiness" is "create freedom, openness to a settlement and life for a human being." In another page he adds "a free donation of the places where a god appears, of the places where gods run away, places where a divine appearance is delayed for a long time" (4). This means that is required the understanding of the emptiness, not only as an amplified concept of the shapes crafted by María Oriza, but also as the environment where she acts and expands her creative spirit.

Maybe her work of art Spline is the best example of her creative genius, that is perpetuated endlessly throughout filling of an emptiness defined by a helicoidal ring that reminds a little bit of the one of Möibus, since it is an endless shape roll up over itself like a twist yarn of wool, allowing the remaining space to be finite. In a way the work of art Spline is conceived to serve as metaphor to the physique concept of the endless screw, without running out of substance in the universe sidereal emptiness. Vacio inagotable is based on the idea of the endless extent of the universe, no like the application of this magic "trick" achieved throughout the curl of a screw roll over itself, but as a creation of a stage of an endless emptiness which axis is a lineal direction to

expand the creative breath and which rhythm is created by a number of rings crafted regularly spaced as if they were vertebrae.

Obviously, this vertebral structure is an invitation to see inner emptiness as a central axis of the creative breathe, which expansion means adding more rings to the work of art, one after another, endlessly. *Hitos* is composed of a “vertebral” association, its structure, however, reminds more to two parallel chains, which vertical expansion is achieved following a juxtaposition axis perpendicular to each one of the marrow axis of the links. This work of art should be seen as two chains of inner emptiness, meanwhile they have a dialogue with the empty space that divide the two columns of “links”. In *Vacío inagotable* this non define progression is highlighted by the virtual movement of the winding lines drawn inside and outside of the rings, always changing according to the spectator’s point of view (the same happens with *Aldaba*), thus situated in front of the sculpture we appreciate just the optic game of the outside lines, but if we move slowly towards a side of the work of art, inside lines get into our visual field, until they reach the first position in our visual field. This optical interference caused by the lines drawn (like in *Caza sueños* also lead us to think about the quality of extension (therefore of the space) that in Bergson words is not “a physical attribute comparable to the others” such as gravity, heat, colour, etc. If we assume that we notice space throughout sight and touch, these lines make the spirit speculate with its own forces about this notion “cutting out a priori one of the figures to determine a priori their properties: the experience, even with the initial contact lost, follow them, despite endless difficulties of the reasoning of its reason” (5). Thus it is the same effect caused by zebra’s strips in our conscience, somehow, left there long time after we have seen the herd passed by.

In addition, it is important the spread of these drawn lines, that built in many María Oriza’s works of art a grid net (*Torre biónica*, *Máscara*, *Abrazo*, *Flor de invierno...*)

For Rosalind Krauss the appearing of the grid in well-known artists of the beginning of the XX century (from Mondrian to Picasso, to Ad Reinhardt to Sol Le Witt...) shows a contradiction: on one hand grid answers a need of “cooling down” of the ontological value of art, getting away from any transcendental project, placing it instead as an exercise of pure objectivity applied to the physical dimension of the piece of work, that’s to say to emphasize full autonomy of art”, on the other hand, grid could mean a return to the original essence of an art considered –in Schwitters words– “vital, sublime as divine, unexplainable as life, non define and endless” (6). Grid in María Oriza’s works of art might share completely this reasoning with Schwitters, far from materialism. Nevertheless, we should look for its truly meaning among the thinkers: Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. To this two philosophers the strips contribute to aid to “translate flat space”, “to tame, to over codify, to neutralize” and moreover to give the space a mean to be propagated, extensive, refracted, renovated, pushed without these

qualities the work will end up dying away: like a mask that not only allows the work to breathe through, but also to achieve a general form of expression” (7).

Besides these two philosophers explain that “the major science (in this case the art to craft significant shapes of clay) has a perpetual need of an inspiration that comes from minor aspects (strips, grooves...). This can be constantly verify in nature, since nature “decorates” with great inspiration birds feathers, fishes scales or the structure’s caparace of a turtle, which, indeed resembles “ the skin” of Torre biónica. Máscara lead us to think in a mollusc’s shell, with grid ornaments which scale changes according to the narrow of its spindle’s shape. Thanks to this feature we might see this work of art or Flor fractal, Gea, Eolo, as the best ones to disclose the secret that are hide in strips and grids: the inspiration mentioned by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari it is just the artistic capability of María Oriza to dynamize her shapes through light’s capture in its skin.

Of course, this capacity depends at first on the properties of the material used to create works of art, wood and glass are two opposite poles in the art to lure light. We shall remember the famous passage of Maurice Merleau -Ponty where he takes the example of a swimming pool to analyze sun’s light magical game and water and the way it distorts all the lines creating a grid at the bottom- (8). In María Oriza sculptures, distortion doesn’t appear by means of light diffraction while it cross a watery lens but distortion is caused by an exact curvature of shapes and the fracturing spaces, a result of the changes in directions in each intersection point. The achievement of this hypnotize and dynamize effect is a sample of the refined technique of María Oriza able to transform the unity of thin walls in fleshly shapes like the commisure of the lips as in Contenedor de sonidos, Caja de Pandora, Pluma... which revealed explicit sex references.

It is obvious that a name like Caja de Pandora is subjugated deliberately in a will to insist in these references, since the libido could be considered as a more mystery box that unleashes everything good and bad of mankind. Pluma is another example indeed more significant of this feminine sexual reference. The same voluptuousness is expressed in the waving shapes of Contenedor de sonidos. Even this idea of secret joint with the earth’s inner intimacy seems to be included on the name of the piece Cueva a cuatro aguas, though its shape is not related to the sexual link of the others pieces. In fact, this piece is remarkable because is a perfect example of the geometric resources used by María Oriza, to translate her shapes into a double dialectic between the inside and the outside, between emptiness and fullness.

Another decorative function of this skin’s sculptures that cannot be omitted is the one that reinforces our possibility to speculate over its open abstract vocation. This was fully expressed by Henri Focillon in Life of Forms: “speculate over an ornament is

speculate over abstraction power and over the endless resources of our imaginary” (9). This speculation drive even further Yves Bonnefoy in Tombs of Ravenna, when she compares ornament with “the concept which consists on denying death, since death is equally what escapes abstraction” (10). María Oriza’s sculptures are fruits of love between fire and humid earth, a tangible metaphor of the denial of death expressed with the same formal resources used by nature in the hymn of life: arches, ellipsoidal curves or hyperbolic, that far from being main characters of a cold geometry the sculptures give sense to the shapes in its spiritual fight between the emptiness that hold or separates them and avoids that emptiness become the moor of the horrifying nothingness.

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Notes:

(1) Abel Jeannière, Héraclite, Traduction et commentaire des Fragments, Éditions Aubier Montaigne, Paris 1985. Pág. 25.

(2) François Cheng, Vide et plein, col. Essais, Les Éditions du Seuil, Paris, 1991. Págs. 62 y 63.

(3) Ángel Valente, Elogio del calígrafo, Galaxia Gutenberg, Barcelona, 2002. Pág. 38.

(4) Martin Heidegger, El arte y el espacio, Herder Editorial, Barcelona, 2009. págs. 21 y 23.

(5) Henri Bergson, L'évolution créatrice, Col. Quadrige, Presses Universitaires de France, Paris 1986. Pág. 205.

(6) Rosalind Krauss, L'originalité de l'avant-garde et autres mythes modernistes, Les Éditions Macula, Paris, 1993. Págs. 136 y 137.

(7) Gilles Deleuze y Felix Guattari, Mille plateaux, les Éditions de Minuit, Paris, 1997. Pág. 607.

(8) Maurice Merleau-Ponty, L'Oeil et l'Esprit, Gallimard, Paris, 1983. Pág. 70.

(9) Henri Focillon, La vie des formes, Presse Universitaires de France, Paris, 1964. Pág. 29.

(10) Yves Bonnefoy, Les Tombeaux de Ravenna, Gallimard, Paris, 1983. Pág. 17.