

# Pino Pinelli.

## Incognita e quanta

Bruno Corà (2012)

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Chiesa di San Matteo | Galleria Claudio Poleschi Arte Contemporanea, Lucca

In a previous analysis of the work of Pino Pinelli<sup>1</sup>, where I highlighted the rapport between the elementariness of the sign and of the fragment with the invisible – but not for this reason inexistent – entity of the unitary tension of his compositions, my attention was already captured by the interrelated codes of what his pictorial-plastic forms evidently suggest to the hermeneutic exercise: on one hand, the fragmentary status of the form and of the sign, and on the other, monochrome in bright expansion, yielded by its special material quality and by Pinelli's particular painting techniques. But today, once again admiring his largest installation made for the nave and apse of the former Church of San Matteo in Lucca, it becomes natural to reopen a full-circle observation of his work in order to develop other considerations and recognize other possible valances, perhaps underplayed or not duly underscored.

Among all those seen in the course of the last few years, Pinelli's work in Lucca is apt to become an emblematic version of his repertoire due to its spatial uniqueness. And we can infer, without running the risk of making erroneous deductions, that it immediately follows the previous work exhibited in Lipari in the Church of Santa Caterina this summer (July 2012). On some panels set up as partitions in front of the walls of that deconsecrated church (just like San Matteo in Lucca) and on the presbytery itself, Pinelli placed three of his painting "ensembles", all monochrome reds, comprised respectively of thirty ovoid elements, twenty-four rectangular shaped elements and six larger parallelograms. Other works of different shape, red and blue, painted between 1993 and 2003, were located in the transept.

In the eyes of the Canadian artist, the installation in Santa Caterina hence certainly supplied the necessary data and prefigured the experience to be developed in Lucca on the walls – this time real walls – and in the apse of San Matteo, a church just as welcoming as Santa Caterina. Walls and ambiences so charged with life experience and on which a thousand years of liturgy, of incense and prayers – but also the percolation of rain water, the effects of earthquakes and other damaging events - have left vivid traces, like wrinkles on the faces of the elderly.

Measuring himself up against such a venue, where time and human

events now invisible, but whose secular breath can still be felt, have succeeded in rendering full of dramatic grace even the objective degradation worn with charm by the former church, was certainly not easy for Pinelli. But the endeavor was successful, probably in virtue of a parsimonious and sensitive ability of perception and management of the bare architecture in which the artist was able to identify both the proper repertory of signs, shapes and colors to use, as well as the spatiality to produce. The latter, as we know, is not an “a priori” condition, but rather an outcome that issues forth from the work. And even before we stop to reflect on it – primary objective of this new commentary – it is important to underscore that the result obtained through it is fruit of an immediate and appropriate “net and clear” choice of the unique white X-shaped sign for the two walls of the large nave and of the iconostasis (sole non-wall “curtain” of the building), while the color red for a fourth “ensemble” of elements was chosen for the apse. Both the locations of the “ensembles”, placed at a considerable height, on the side walls of the large hall, were produced through compositions of forty-five elements each, with curved profiles - ascending and descending, respectively - like the trail of two bright comets on the dark and faded plaster, where residual cracks, the effects of rainfall, the peeling off of overlapping and thickened coats of wall paint have been radiantly surmounted by Pinelli’s brushstrokes.

The two spatial compositions of candid elements, with their typical bristled surfaces, swarm spatially and offer the viewer’s eye the image of “firmaments” comprised of forms that, well beyond celestial evocation, summon to mind the amount of overlapping unknowns (*incognita*) of the spatial dimension. For these works and for the “rose” of Xs that stand out frontally on the wall that separates the church in two, abandoning the apse that remains visible from just one door, it is no exaggeration to evoke both the Egyptian sky of the goddess Nut - magical anthropomorphism invented by an ancient artifice to symbolize the vault of the sky — and the mosaic celestial vault itself that internally coats the last abode of Galla Placidia in Ravenna.

We have just hinted at the sign-form chosen by Pinelli and, in speaking about the spatiality he obtains in this Lucca work, we must make a clarification concerning the technique applied to his way of working called “dissemination”<sup>2</sup>, a term accepted and shared by the artist himself.

Actually, if we consider that in nature, the concept of unity - on the same level with that of perfection or symmetry and others - is purely ideal and virtual, i.e., it is an archetype whose origin and hence objective ability of checking has been lost, the only thing available to our experience in the end is the universal reality of the fragment. It is hence morphology and the broadest material state that we know (up to the paradoxical but possible affirmation that everything is fragment), despite the fact that the human mind never ceases to evoke a primigenial idea of unity: perhaps for this reason it suggests a drama with no possible return to its original integrity. The fact is that from our solar

system to our galaxy and up to the still immeasurable universe, the stars and particulate matter, up to dark energy - everything looks like cosmic dissemination (yes!) of fragments, with no apparent chance for reintegration inside the whole, conceived *ab initio* from the scientific theories of the Big Bang as a point destined to explode.

Starting from this consideration, it would be spontaneous to renounce to critically circumscribing works of art comprised of fragments of others whose presumed unity in reality is, in a wider sense, a fragment per se. This hence renders moot or at least relative – albeit legitimate – the attribution assigned by several critical essays<sup>3</sup> to Pinelli's work (like to hundreds of other artists) of belonging to the morphological-aesthetic aspect of “dissemination”, unless as a purely generic meaning of the concept. Upon closer look and, visually, closer observation, since the act of disseminating means “to spread here and there”, “as the sower does with seeds”, “to scatter in several parts in different points,”<sup>4</sup> the term in question is inappropriate because dissemination entails dispersion into space. But this, as can be assessed, contrasts with Pinelli's inherent ability of “spacing”, i.e., of juxtaposing through precise criteria that completely answer a well defined formalization of his “ensembles”, for the placement of which, in the different milieus, he follows an inescapable compositional order to evoke a spatiality that is all but casual.

If we agree with such a clarification (which by no means wants to upset any previous hermeneutic attempt!), then the sense to be grasped when observing Pinelli's great work on the walls of San Matteo is to recognize its semantic and spatial properties rather than to try and describe, define and clarify the work, in vain. In so doing, we wholly adopt the statement by Roland Barthes, quoted for the first time by Pinelli himself, whereby: «critique cannot claim to define the work and to clarify it, since nothing is clearer than the work itself. It can, instead, generate a certain sense, deriving it from a form, which is the work itself. And this because the rapport between critique and the work is the same that exists between a sense and a form».<sup>5</sup>

It seems hence appropriate, in this essay, to recall two contributions of particular clarity, and here I am referring to the intuition by Menna who, by stating that «Pinelli's work consciously places itself on the side of form: between the terms “meaning” and “perceiving” it opts for the second, embracing the moment of sensoriality (seeing and touching)...»<sup>6</sup>, it recognizes it as “metonymic” painting “rendered as synecdoche” – and the following proud identification by Lamarche-Vadel who, at the beginning of 1979, writes several important lines about Pinelli's work, among which: «What personally struck me about this group of works [by Pinelli, editor's note] is the union of a series of allusions to what already at the time could have constituted an escape from the imperialism of monochrome painting...».<sup>7</sup> In his exhaustive contribution, the French scholar and curator of the “Fracture du monochrome” section of the *Abstraction Analytique* exhibition held at the Museum of Modern Art in Paris

(June 1978), also states that: «In 1974, Pinelli develops an eccentricity that had to lead him to discover the new post-monochrome space (...) From numerous clues, I feel that contemporary painting is re-inventing the fresco and that soon numerous archaisms (...) often in contradiction with the formal aspect represented, will be swept away by this re-invention (...)» and that «The work that Pinelli created on the walls of the Museum of Modern Art in Paris in June 1978 (...) performed a premonitory action, upon re-examination in an ensemble of recent actions where I can already clearly distinguish (...) the grandiose future (or coming) of the European school that would overcome both the Oedipal foolishness and the repetition of a change in saturation...». <sup>8</sup> These observations contain enough to credit Pinelli with having perceived something which – although shared by other artists, from Gastini to Griffa, from Dezeuze to Pozzi (at least in the first half of the Seventies) – must more appropriately be called “deconstruction” rather than “dissemination”. Recently, Dezeuze himself, in putting together the *Dictionnaire de Support/Surfaces (1967-1972)*, for the definition of “déconstruction”, writes: «La déconstruction ne se veut pas un système définitivement clos, mais un questionnement. Elle ne livre pas une conclusion mais elle ouvre sur des possibles en termes de réflexion analytique. Elle s'intéresse aux processus autant qu'aux produits finis et par la même traite des schémas fondamentaux: fond/surface, essence/accident, dessus/dessous, horizontal/vertical, derrière/devant...». <sup>9</sup>

Having supplied this clarification which, in my opinion, is above all a specification, a further step becomes spontaneous, and that is to ask ourselves: but which conception and type of work must we refer to in order to acknowledge Pinelli his effective and decisive choice to deconstruct his paintings in order to attain the “ensembles” he composes for a new “polytope” spatiality? As hard as we may try to identify several examples of inspiration, we cannot elude that primary source, still active today, from which the initial vein of the very notion of “deconstruction” flowed: Lucio Fontana. To his action we owe the most fertile series of spatial concepts, from 1949 to 1960, from “Ambienti” to “Buchi”, to “Tagli”, to “Quanta”. And this latter creation of his epitomizes both the breaking of the surface of the canvas-painting (which can no longer be called as such since now it takes on round, oval, triangular, pentagonal trapezoidal and quadrilateral forms), and the end of the mono-iconic work to make room for the work-ensemble of several elements. *Quanta* have authorized Pinelli - and not only him - to open up the monochrome in order to produce a new spatiality comprised of painting elements which, by making use of forms, of intervals between them, of new qualities of color, of deferred heights and directions, is perceived as topologically dislocated, ideally dynamic, fluctuating on the wall or on any other support, embodying new semiological values and above all producing in the viewer a perceptive conscience that invites him or her to produce the missing but imaginable and perceptible spatiality.

And this is what happened to Pinelli's painting after Fontana. Pinelli, totally

consciously, expressed conceptual spatiality through further modalities and evoked unprecedented concrete degrees of it. And above all, by deconstructing the form of his initial painting in the physical and spatial sense, he individually induced the viewer to perform – albeit ideally – constructive mental processes of spatial plastic articulation of his fragmented proposals.

How can we then approach this monumental “new fresco” produced by Pinelli on the walls of the Romanesque Church of S. Matteo, where once historical sacred fabulations appeared? The two facing firmaments outlined by white X-shaped painting - *Incognita* that must be imagined as innumerable in our infinite space-time - unite in the strain towards the perspective center of space, polarized by the ensemble of white forms arranged in circular fashion and by the excitation produced when the eye meets a jubilee ascension of red pictorial forms that, in full light, gains height in the apse of the church, arousing a thought provoked not so much by metaphysics, but rather by the physical perception of a new spatial invention.

In a different synthesis, today we can resolve - with more mature outcomes - those problems and propositions of a spatial sense already precociously delineated in the analogous installation made at the Museum of Modern Arts in Paris, over thirty years ago.

1 Bruno Corà, *Pino Pinelli: Painting as a fragment and unitary tension*, in *Pino Pinelli*, exhibition catalogue at A arte Studio Invernizzi, Milan May 17 – July 6 2007, A arte Studio Invernizzi, Milan 2007.

2 This term was approached by Giorgio Bonomi in *La disseminazione*, Rubettino publisher, 2009 and even before him, by Claudio Cerritelli in *Pittura Aniconica – Arte e Critica in Italia 1968-2007*, Edizioni Gabriele Mazzotta, Milano 2008, pp. 33-38.

3 Giorgio Bonomi, *op. cit.*

4 Salvatore Battaglia, *Grande Dizionario della Lingua Italiana*, vol. IV, Dah-Dunn, Unione Tipografico-Editrice Torinese, 19781, pag. 764-765.

6 Filiberto Menna, in *Pino Pinelli*, cit.

7 Bernard Lamarche-Vadel, in *Pino Pinelli*, cit., published in B. Lamarche-Vadel, *Pino Pinelli*, Artra/studio Gallery, 1979.

8 *Ibid.*

9 Daniel Dezeuze, *Dictionnaire de Supports /Surfaces (1967-1972)*, Ceysson Edition d'Art, Saint Étienne, 2011, p. 48.